DVD ROM

PS2 DVD INSIDE • 7 PLAYABLE DEMOS IN ALL!

DESTROY ALL HUMANS 2

1UP NETWORK

OFFICIAL U.S.

PlayStation MAGAZINE

YOUR #1 PLAYSTATION AUTHORITY



OPM INTERVIEW

ITAGAKI SPEAKS

TEAM NINJA'S LEADER TALKS NEXT GEN

ps3 IT'S Here

SPECIAL

34

PAGE LAUNCH GUIDE!

world-exclusive PS3 game review

resistance: FALL OF MAN

WE PUT INSOMNIAC'S FIRST-PERSON EPIC THROUGH ITS PACES

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DON'T HIDE. RESIST.

The year is 1951. Europe has been overrun by the Chimera. U.S. Army Sgt. Nathan Hale stands in their way. Welcome to the disturbingly real world of Resistance: Fall of Man. The PlayStation®3 system's advanced microprocessor, the Cell Broadband Engine™, thrusts you into battlefield chaos as vicious creatures swarm from all directions. And with a powerful arsenal of weapons that fire around and through obstacles, hiding isn't an option. Go it alone in the harrowing single-player campaign, play with a buddy in co-op or enlist with up to 40 players online.

RESISTANCE
FALL OF MAN™

PLAY B∃YOND™

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MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
PLAYSTATION 3
PLAYSTATION 3

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mountain air, tire smoke and nitrous

With cities cracking down on street racing and the once-underground drift scene sliding toward sanctioned respectability, the corest of the core are heading for the hills. Or, more accurately, the canyons, where it all began decades ago in the Japanese touge.

A perfectly executed drift is a marvel of physics and a thing of beauty on a track, but on a plummeting mountain turn, the stakes – and the adrenaline levels – are higher: In street racing, a bad night ends with the police impounding your ride and crushing it. In the canyons, a bad night ends with a 200-foot drop into a ravine – and your ride crushing you.

THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO GET



crews | Raw skill wins races. Recruiting a rock-solid crew paves the road to world domination.

drafter
Purist. Team player. Creates the aerodynamic draft that slingshots you to the front of the pack.



scout
Knows the map – and what's not on the map. Sees around corners. Finds shortcuts.



blocker
Rough. Aggro. Makes life hell for your opponent. Opens the road wide for you.



fabricator
Master of mods – adds body panels, roof scoops, tall wheels, exhaust kits, wings.



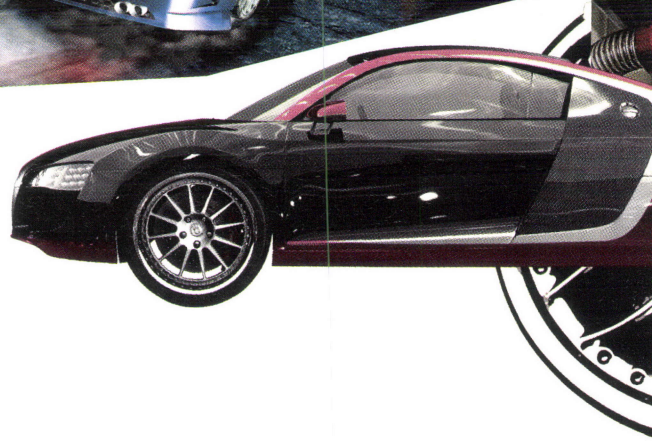
mechanic
Has skills to boost your ride's juice and connections to get discounts on cars and parts.



fixer
Keeps the heat off your back – and gets you extra money when you win races.









PLATFORM SPECIFICATIONS

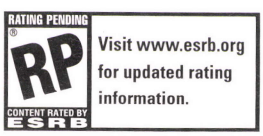












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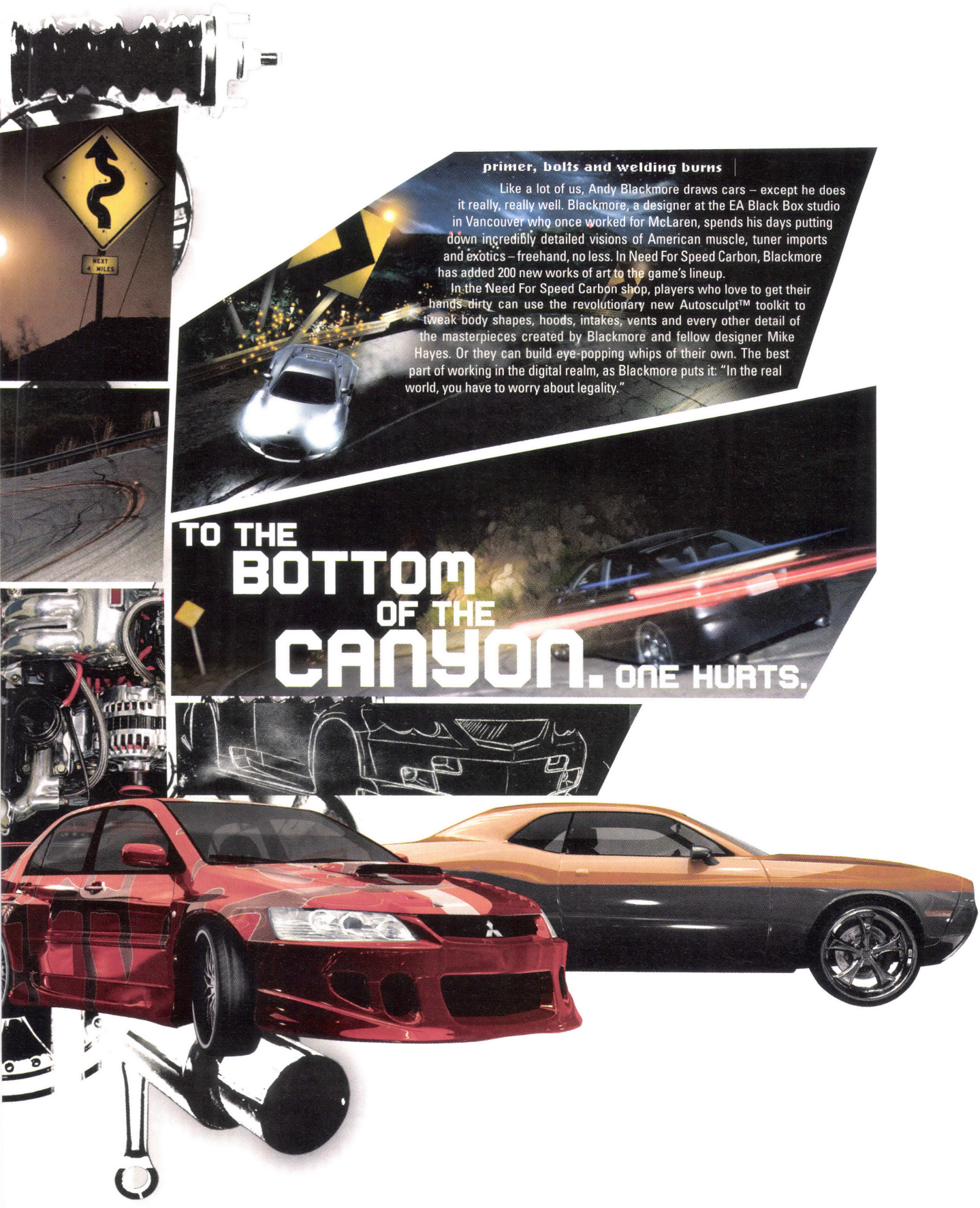
NEED FOR SPEED CARBON

FACTOID: 91,000 car paints in game

INFORMATION
www.nfscarbon.com

DEVELOPMENT START
01 | 03 | 05

DATE OF RELEASE
11 | 01 | 06



primer, bolts and welding burns

Like a lot of us, Andy Blackmore draws cars – except he does it really, really well. Blackmore, a designer at the EA Black Box studio in Vancouver who once worked for McLaren, spends his days putting down incredibly detailed visions of American muscle, tuner imports and exotics – freehand, no less. In Need For Speed Carbon, Blackmore has added 200 new works of art to the game's lineup.

In the Need For Speed Carbon shop, players who love to get their hands dirty can use the revolutionary new Autosculpt™ toolkit to tweak body shapes, hoods, intakes, vents and every other detail of the masterpieces created by Blackmore and fellow designer Mike Hayes. Or they can build eye-popping whips of their own. The best part of working in the digital realm, as Blackmore puts it: "In the real world, you have to worry about legality."

TO THE BOTTOM OF THE CANYON. ONE HURTS.



Editor's Choice Awards

– Official Xbox Magazine, PC Gamer, Computer Gaming World, IGN, GameSpot, Team Xbox, GameZone



"Superb... A remarkable achievement"

– GameSpot



"An Absolute Masterpiece"

– Official Xbox Magazine



"If any game is worth the price of the PS3, Oblivion is it."

– Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine, November 2006

PLAYSTATION 3

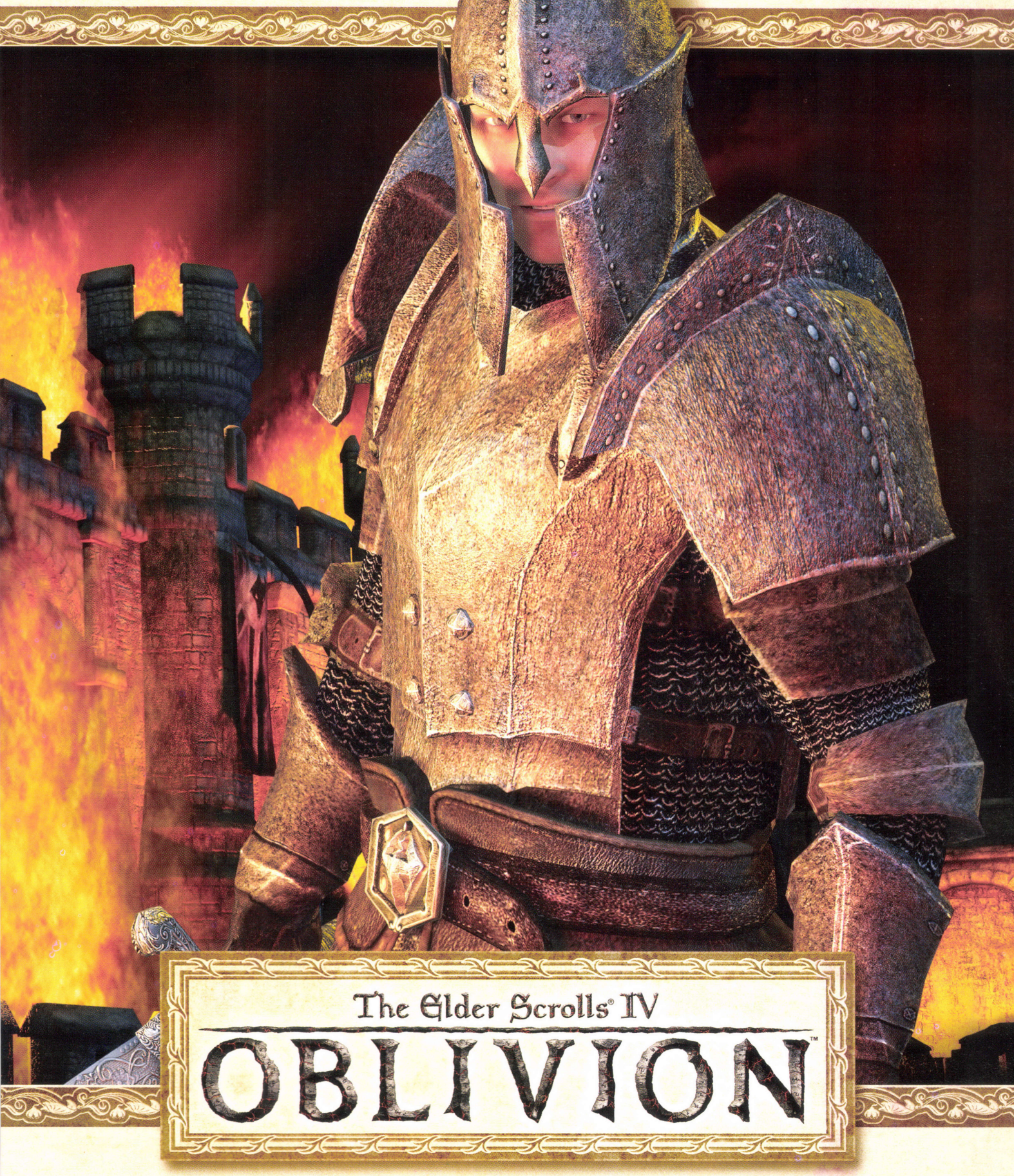
MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Language
Sexual Themes
Use of Alcohol
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE

BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS

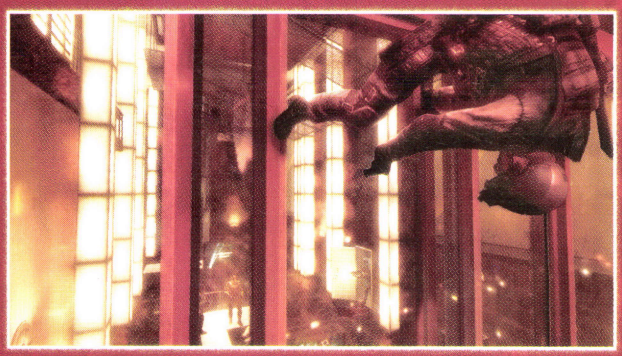
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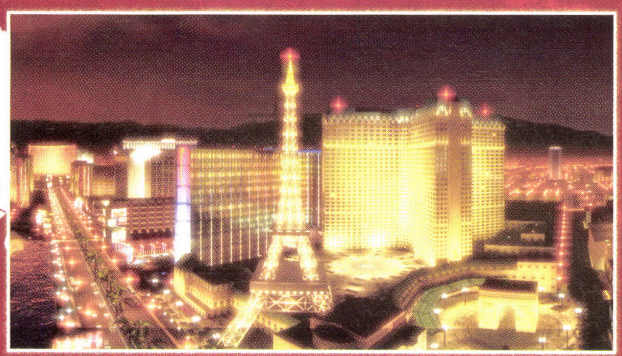
Coming November to PLAYSTATION®3 computer entertainment system

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PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

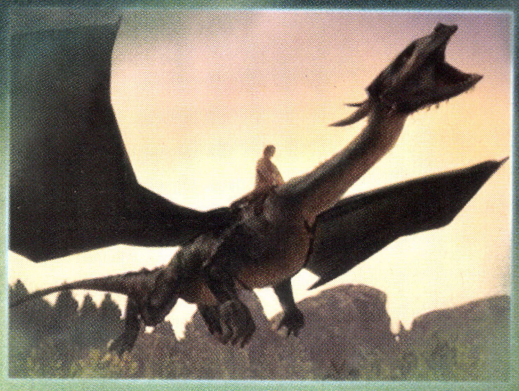
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brought peace and prosperity to Alagaësia.
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super power full

It takes a documentary, produced every week by an in-house video crew, to help EA producer Jeff Peters keep track of the huge array of powers and attack combinations that the 140 developers working on *Superman Returns*™: The Videogame have put together. "*Metallo,* for instance, is 60 stories tall," he says, "so you might want to fly around the city a little bit, maybe down to the port, and find something really massive – a ship, for example – pick that up and hurl it at him." Each villain has different strengths – and unique vulnerabilities – so attacks that devastate one enemy won't necessarily work against another.

"With a villain like *Riot,* you may want to keep your distance," he says. "You could do something like grab a fuel truck, throw it toward him, then blow it up with your heat vision just before it hits him." If the ensuing explosion happens to set an apartment building on fire, Peters suggests leaving the fight for a moment to airlift a fire engine to the scene so it can douse the flames, then rejoining the battle. "There are so many different things you can do," Peters says. "It all adds up to this amazing feeling of freedom."



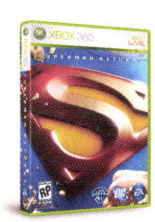
flight manifest

When he was 13, EA level designer Zach Wilson used to blow his entire $10-a-week allowance on *Superman* and other comic books. For the last two years, he's been tights-deep in processor cycles and aerodynamics with the rest of the team working on *Superman Returns*, giving life to the *Man of Steel* with his own personal branch of physics – from takeoff to 800-m.p.h. flight through the densely packed streets of Metropolis to midair hand-to-hand combat.

"The hardest thing with flight in a 3D environment is to make it look realistic and make it easy to learn at the same time." EA's state-of-the-art development methods gave Wilson & co. the tools to nail that balance between realism and playability. "Gamers can be so skeptical," Wilson says. "I understand – I used to be those guys. That's what motivates us: to prove to the world that we can pull it off."







PLATFORM SPECIFICATIONS

NINTENDO DS. GAME BOY ADVANCE

XBOX LIVE. XBOX 360. XBOX

INTERNET CONNECTION required for online features. Online features may not be available on all platforms. See product packs for details. Available on PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system and PSP™ (PlayStation®Portable) system. SUPERMAN RETURNS™: THE VIDEOGAME Software © 2006 Electronic Arts Inc. Electronic Arts, EA and the EA logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Electronic Arts Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. All Rights Reserved. "PS2" is a trademark and "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Memory Stick Duo™ may be required (sold separately). Movies: EA™ is an Electronic Arts™ brand. Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, the Xbox logos, and the Xbox Live logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries. ™ & ® Game Boy Advance and Nintendo DS are trademarks of Nintendo. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. EA™ is an Electronic Arts™ brand.
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(s06)

TEEN T Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

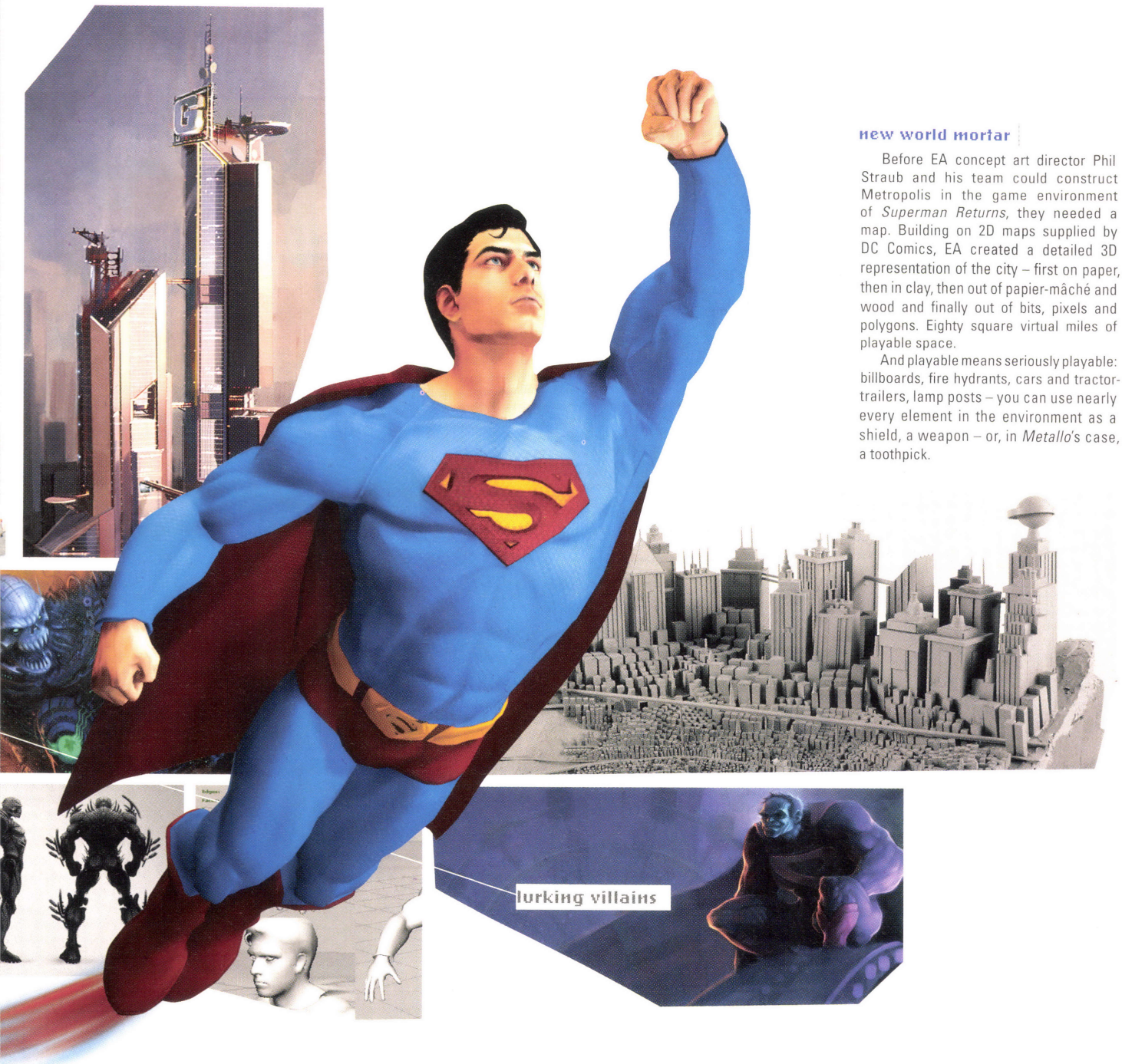
TITLE

SUPERMAN RETURNS™
THE VIDEOGAME

FACTOID: 140 game creators

INFORMATION
www.BeSuperman.com

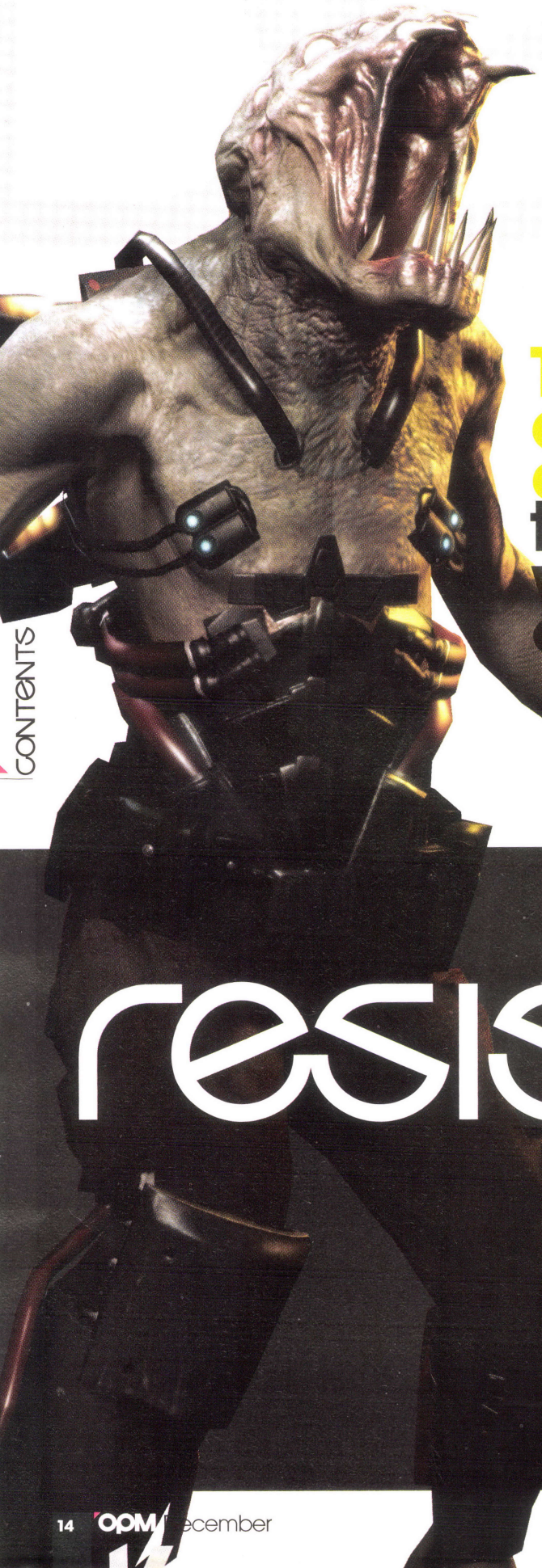
DATE OF RELEASE
11|22|06



new world mortar

Before EA concept art director Phil Straub and his team could construct Metropolis in the game environment of *Superman Returns*, they needed a map. Building on 2D maps supplied by DC Comics, EA created a detailed 3D representation of the city – first on paper, then in clay, then out of papier-mâché and wood and finally out of bits, pixels and polygons. Eighty square virtual miles of playable space.

And playable means seriously playable: billboards, fire hydrants, cars and tractor-trailers, lamp posts – you can use nearly every element in the environment as a shield, a weapon – or, in *Metallo*'s case, a toothpick.



This is the game everyone is looking at to set the tone for the PS3. Can it bear the weight of these heavy expectations?

world-exclusive review!

resistance

FALL OF MAN



page 110

CONTENTS

input



Reader Mail
20\\\> In which you write long, sprawling epistles and we mock you.

hype



Let's Go Japan!

30\\\> The wonderful, wacky world of TGS.
The Big Picture
34\\\> PS3 is the new PS2.
The OPM Interview
36\\\> Team Ninja's Itagaki goes all Sony on us.
J-Town
40\\\> What it's like to meet a legend.
Pause
42\\\> When you're not playing games.
Calendar
44\\\> Stuff happens. Find out when.

reviews



101\\\> Resistance: Fall of Man
116\\\> Need for Speed Carbon
118\\\> Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner
119\\\> .hack//G.U. Vol. 1//Rebirth
119\\\> Tales of the Abyss
120\\\> Bully
122\\\> Destroy All Humans 2
123\\\> Justice League Heroes
124\\\> Guitar Hero II
126\\\> Mortal Kombat Armageddon
126\\\> NBA Live 07
126\\\> WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 07
128\\\> Killzone: Liberation
130\\\> Ace Combat X
130\\\> Death, Jr. 2: Root of Evil
130\\\> Gitaroo Man Lives!
132\\\> Medal of Honor Heroes
134\\\> Dynasty Warriors Vol. 2
134\\\> Guilty Gear Judgment
134\\\> Power Stone Collection
136\\\> Gunpey
136\\\> Lumines II
136\\\> WTF

launch guide



The PS3 Is Here

53\\\> At long last, the wait is over.
The Hardware
56\\\> Ten pounds of burning love.
The Setup
62\\\> Music, movies, Web browsing—what *can't* it do!
Getting Online
64\\\> Finally, you can.
The Launch Games
68\\\> What you can play now.
The Games of 07
84\\\> *MGS4, DMC4,* and all sorts of other fun letter-number combos
The Movies
104\\\> That Blu-Ray drive cost you $600; get all the use from it you can.

replay



Out to Launch

142\\\> Sony's done this before—has it learned from past mistakes?
Sound Station
148\\\> The (mostly) awesomeness that is the music of *Guitar Hero II.*
Your First Time
150\\\> *NCIS'* Pauley Perrette loves to *Crash.*

ps



In My Day
154\\\> Welcome to a microtransacted world.

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\\\> Like Magazines, but Shinier

Can't wait a month? Then come to the dark side, also known as the beautiful time-wasting Internet. There you'll find video footage of all the hottest new games, editor blogs, extra screens and info that aren't in the magazine, and fancy new stories. And it's all right there on the Web, where at any second your favorite editor might be on the other end of the connection, waiting for you.

radiopm

\\\> Can You Hear Us Now?

Why yes, you can. In fact, you can hear us in a brand-new podcast every Thursday, available at the following fine locations.

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Games Covered Inside

PS3

97\\\> Armored Core 4
97\\\> Battlefield: Bad Company
98\\\> Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War
79\\\> Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII
70\\\> Call of Duty 3
98\\\> The Darkness
96\\\> Def Jam: Icon
94\\\> Devil May Cry 4
72\\\> The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion
98\\\> The Eye of Judgment
98\\\> Fatal Inertia
82\\\> F.E.A.R.
74\\\> Fight Night Round 3
99\\\> Final Fantasy XIII
99\\\> Formula 1 Championship Edition
78\\\> Full Auto 2: Battlelines
72\\\> Genji: Days of the Blade
99\\\> Gran Turismo HD
100\\\> Half-Life 2
100\\\> Harker
100\\\> Heavenly Sword
100\\\> Hellboy
92\\\> Lair
74\\\> Madden NFL 07
70\\\> Marvel: Ultimate Alliance
84\\\> Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
79\\\> Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire
86\\\> MotorStorm
78\\\> NBA 07
79\\\> NBA 2K7
74\\\> NBA Live 07
74\\\> Need for Speed Carbon
102\\\> Ni-Oh
79\\\> NHL 2K7
88\\\> Ninja Gaiden Sigma
82\\\> Rainbow Six Vegas
110\\\> Resistance: Fall of Man
78\\\> Ridge Racer 7
97\\\> Skate
72\\\> Sonic the Hedgehog
102\\\> Star Wars NextGen
102\\\> Stranglehold
74\\\> Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07
70\\\> Tony Hawk's Project 8
72\\\> Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom
93\\\> Virtua Fighter 5
102\\\> Virtua Tennis 3
93\\\> Warhawk

PS2

119\\\> .hack//G.U. Vol. 1// Rebirth
120\\\> Bully
122\\\> Destroy All Humans 2
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123\\\> Justice League Heroes
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128\\\> Killzone: Liberation
136\\\> Lumines II
132\\\> Medal of Honor Heroes
134\\\> Power Stone Collection
136\\\> WTF



WELCOME TO OUR WORLD

One of the things we pride ourselves on is bringing you the latest and greatest demos the gaming world has to offer. That is one of the benefits of reading the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, which you are holding right here in your hands.

This month's disc takes you back to the hippie days of the '60s as Crypto 137 tries once more to wipe out humanity in *Destroy All Humans 2*. You can also see what Lego antics Traveller's Tales has been up to since building *Star Wars* brick by brick. But that's not all! Check out the other cool games on this month's disc and see if you can find our special hidden demo.

So, what are you waiting for? Grab the disc and get to your PlayStation 2.

PLAY IT

Bionicle Heroes



Lego is teaming up with Traveller's Tales to invade your console once more—but with another of Lego's popular brands this time.

Destroy All Humans 2



In this sequel, Furon scout Crypto 137 returns to Earth to finish off the human race. Join him on his psychedelic trip with this demo.

.hack//G.U. Vol. 1//Rebirth



Join *The World* as Haseo, a player of the Adept Rogue class, and enjoy the revamped battle system and advanced AI.

FIFA 07



Check out various leagues and manage your team before kicking off the 2007 season—hone your mad footballin' skillz.

Eragon



Call in dragon strikes as you take on enemy soldiers in this demo based on the movie inspired by Christopher Paolini's fantasy novel.

Kim Possible: What's the Switch?



Play as Kim or Shego in this platformer and utilize your acrobatic finesse to save the day. A preview mode showcases other levels.

Hidden Demo



This month's disc features another hidden surprise. Press the buttons to unlock a treat, then you can feel the beat. Er, you get the idea.

WATCH IT

Bionicle Heroes



Check out your favorite Lego characters, each with their own unique abilities, and see if you have what it takes to become a Bionicle hero.

Sonic Rivals



Sonic invades your PSP with this racing-platformer featuring classic 2D gameplay mixed with 3D environments.

Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops



Snake will soon be with us—but until then, here's another trailer from Konami showcasing more about this killer game for your PSP.

inside the game

Guitar Hero II



Can't get enough of *Guitar Hero II*? Yeah, neither can we! So go behind the scenes with the masterminds at RedOctane.

Gangs of London



Get the scoop on the new game from the team that brought you *The Getaway* and learn more about this war on the London streets.

111

PLAYSTATION UNDERGROUND TEAM

Demo Disc Producers
Gary Barth, Cori Lucas, Manuel Sousa, Chris Tan

Marketing Team
Steve Williams, Eric Lempel, Jesse Caid

Executive Producer
Peter Dille

QA
Sam Bradley, Edward Toomy

Account Coordinator
Justin Flores

Programming and interface artwork by Lifelike Productions, Inc.

Lead Programmers William Bohan, Ron Midthun, Avery Lodato

3D Artists Jason Robinson, Philip Williamson, David Hayes

President Katherine Williams

Technical Director Tim Edwards

SPECIAL THANKS

Maimoona Block, Kirsten Costello, Christine DeNezza, Tom Gillan, Gerald Martin, Sean Thomas, Jim Williams

DISC PROBLEMS?

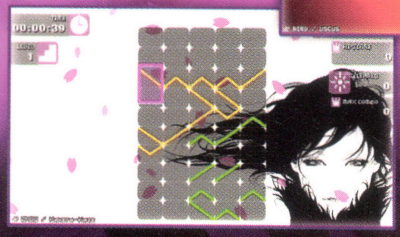
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"...both games are unique in style and play, you might even want to pick both up."
– IGN

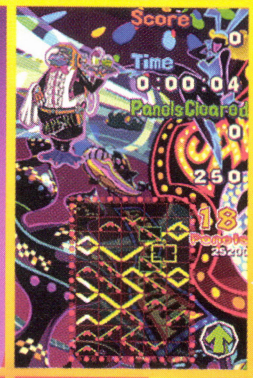


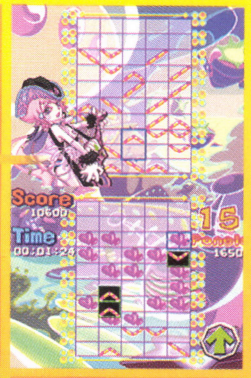


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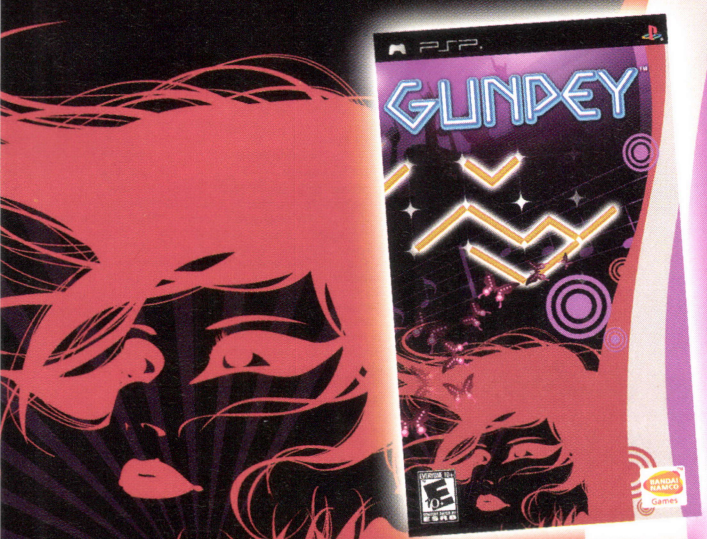


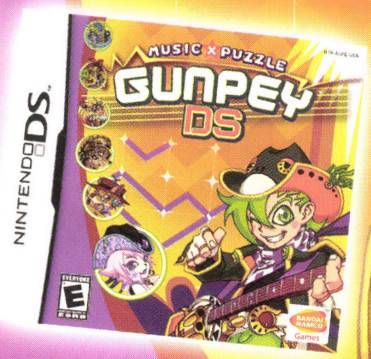
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the OPM family

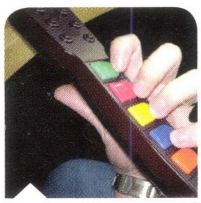


Tom Byron

Ooh, look at da cute wittle baby! No, Tom isn't talking about himself; he's talking about his new bundle of joy, the PS3! *OPM* has gotten some quality time with the not-so-little bugger (10 pounds!) and now everybody else will when the console hits store shelves on November 17. Tom also wants you to check out the 34-page PS3 Launch Guide and Joe's review of *Resistance: Fall of Man*, which Tom calls "a damn fine read."



Dana Jongewaard has immersed herself pretty thoroughly in the world of Bullworth Academy this past month, which probably explains why she's started randomly throwing dodgeballs at people who pass by her in the hallway.



Joe Rybicki spent so much time playing *Guitar Hero II* this month that it's entirely possible he's permanently damaged his left hand. It's even hard for him to give Alejandro the finger! Let this be a lesson to you, people: Always take breaks!



Thierry Nguyen is sad to say that the best thing he saw in Tokyo was NOT the PS3 (although that and its slate of 2007 games are high on his list of awesomeness), it was this bizarre Ewok drawing on a $5 copy of *Shadows of the Empire* for the N64.



Giancarlo Varanini is so very excited about the launch of the PlayStation 3. So very excited, in fact, that he plans to sit down and eat some potato chips on November 17 because he refuses to wait in line for a console launch.



Logan Parr won't be heading Down Under for the holidays this year, which is a pity as the beaches in New Zealand are fabulous as summer kicks into high gear down there. This also means he will miss spending time with the family's pet pukeko. Shame.



Ryan Vulk finally—five years after getting out of college—is going to break down and get rid of his rusty old graphite Mac. So what will the many Benjamins he's throwing down get him? A Mac Pro with that sexy smooth flatscreen monitor. Mmmmmm....



Alejandro Chavetta spent two days taking pictures of every single person from the staffs of *OPM*, *EGM*, *GFW*, GameVideos, and 1UP. Now when he closes his eyes, he sees many faces. Sooooo many porous, aged-looking, pretty faces.

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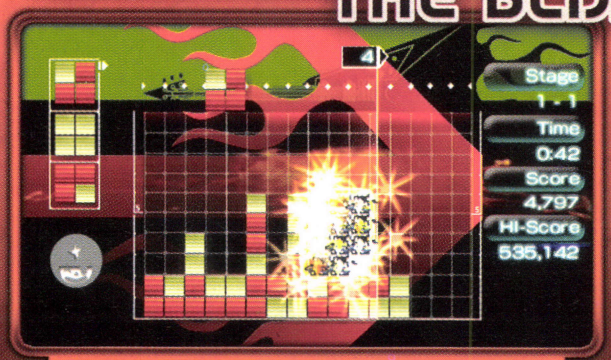


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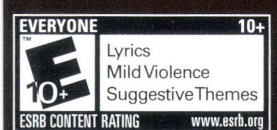


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INPUT

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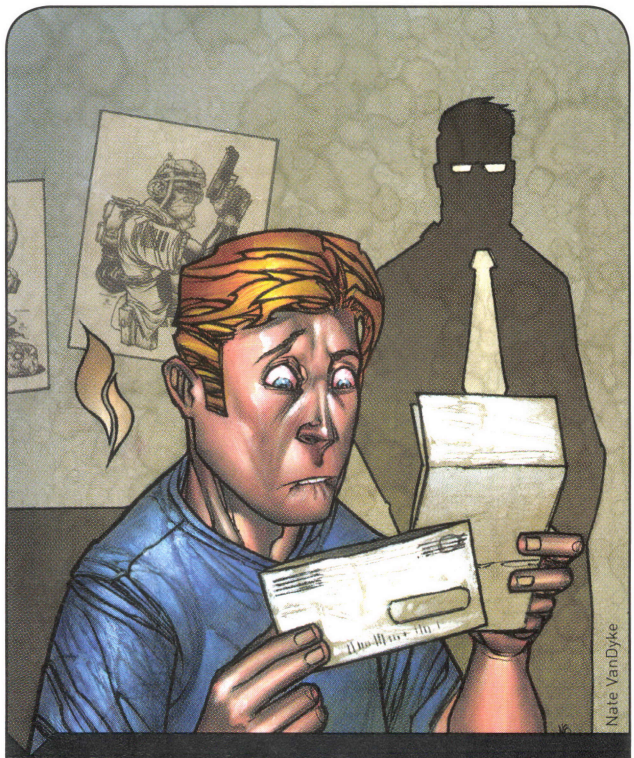


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letter of the month

You're Welcome. Now Take a Shower!

So I'm sitting here reading my *Official PlayStation Magazine*, and the respectable leader of my domain (Dad) comes through the front door with the rest of the mail in his hand. Since you already know that I am reading the magazine, you can probably guess that it was the first thing that I yanked out of the mailbox before he got home. "Hey, dude, did you pay for something with our credit card?" he asks with a puzzled but stern look on his face. I sat there staring at him with a more puzzled but less stern look on my face. Seeing as I don't know what the credit card number is, and seeing that I am inches away from punishment for an act that I am not guilty of, I decided to tell the truth for a change.

"No?"

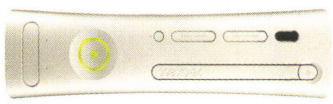
I didn't mean for it to come out as a question, but seeing as my save point was four hours before this event occurred, it was too late to turn back now. He gracefully threw a white envelope with a clear plastic coating and a bill-like message on the cover at my head. I tore it open with my sweaty, shaking hands, thinking to myself, "Oh, god—I just got my videogames back! What'd I do this time? Goodbye, *LocoRoco*, goodbye, *Lego Star Wars*, and goodbye any hopes of ever playing *Grand Theft Auto* before I'm 17."

I read the letter.

It involves a lot of "blah, blah, blah," but it eventually gets to the point. I've got to pay my fees for next year's subscription to *OPM*. I breathe a sigh of relief, and thank the lord that I have my gaming privileges still within my grasp (at least until the next report card). I quickly get my parents to stuff the envelope with $30, and I drop it off at the nearest mailbox.

Thank you, *OPM*, for scaring the crap out of me.

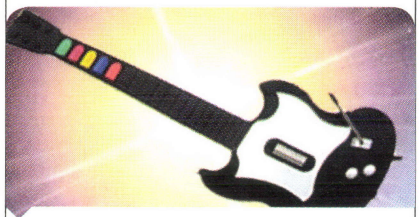
Daniel Speer
Via e-mail



The Pwnee Pwns the Pwnr

Dear Mr. Kon: If *OPM* will allow it, I'd love to respond to your letter (Input, November 2006) concerning the errors in an earlier letter I had written (Input, September 2006). Firstly, and least importantly, the $70 Xbox Live subscription I mentioned, but didn't specify, is the one that includes the headset. Which, at the time my first letter was written (late May/early June), cost $70. While not an error in numbers, it can certainly be argued that one might not need to replace a headset every year. The point being that whatever the sum of subscription cost may be, it is not a cost that a PS3 owner will incur. Secondly, 1080p resolution and HDMI are burgeoning technologies, yes, but do you really think you should gauge the impact of this technology based on an unspecified sales statistic referring to a period of time that is prior to the release of the PS3? Or widespread Blu-ray movie distribution? Or HD-DVD movies for that matter? Fifteen percent? Talk to me in a year. Or maybe you're right, and this whole "high-def" thing will just blow over. Thirdly, you are not an Xboxer. You're writing a letter to *OPM*. Fourth, as one who realizes "good games are good games," what part of "defending a great library of PS2 games" offended you? The fact that a great game can overcome technological boundaries was exactly the point, Michael. Please, my friend, try to see the forest for the trees.

Brian Rago
Via e-mail



Guitar Hero Worship

I never in a million years thought I would see a demo of *Guitar Hero II* on one of your discs (*OPM*, November 2006). If I hadn't had company when I opened up the magazine, I would have rushed upstairs to play it that very moment. When I couldn't contain myself any longer, I finally did sneak up to try it out because I couldn't wait to at least see





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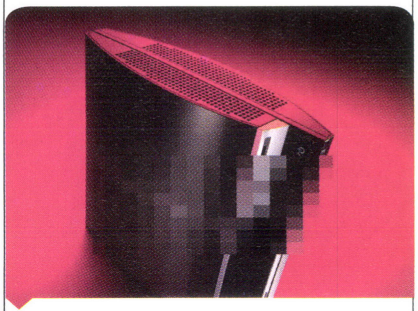
what songs you were able to get your hands on, and I was pleasantly surprised that not only were there four songs on the demo (I would have been happy with one or two), but they were some of the best songs on the partial list we've seen thus far. Huge kudos for what is now my favorite demo disc ever.
Jennifer Orr
Via e-mail



Grand Theft Cuthbert

That little article about Elisha Cuthbert ("Your First Time," OPM November 2006) has a misplaced picture, or so I think. Where it says *Grand Theft Auto III*, there's a picture of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* instead. Now, it's not a big deal, but I'm just pointing it out.
Vu Tran
Via e-mail

Thanks, Vu—and, gosh, you're right! We DID run the wrong image. Here's the correct one.



The PS3 Will Play PORN?!

Regarding the "Thanks for the Memories" Sony formats guide (October 2006, page 100), Sony and Philips codeveloped the compact disc, not the DVD. DVD was a collaboration involving Sony, Philips, Toshiba (Sony's main rival in the current Blu-ray vs. HD-DVD thing), and several other companies. And while Sony and its audio/video formats have tended to be insular, Betamax machines were offered by several manufacturers. The guide neglects to mention a couple of important reasons for the failure of Betamax: The format initially allowed only a one-hour recording time per cassette (Sony refused to compromise the recording quality with options for slower tape speeds, but this also meant that early adopters couldn't fit a feature-length film onto a Betamax tape), and there was no Betamax porn (Sony wouldn't license the format to pornographers, so the pornographers went with VHS). Sony seems to have learned its lesson as far as the porn is concerned, since there have been porn UMDs in Japan, and I'd be surprised if porn doesn't eventually show up on Blu-ray.
Timothy C.
Via e-mail



GPSP?

I was searching the Web, and I found some news that Sony is planning on a GPS for the PSP. Has there been any official news that you guys have heard of, or is that just some crap? I also read that people have modded their PSP into a GPS, so it is possible.
Nick
Via e-mail

Nick, you're in luck—almost! Japanese website ITmedia (plusd.itmedia.co.jp) recently reported that the GPS attachment for the PSP will be available in December, though only in Japan; a U.S. date has not been set and Sony is not saying if it will even be available here. The MAPLUS (we prefer the catchier GPSP mainly because we made it up) will not only help you find your way, including points of interest, it reportedly will work with games, including Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops, *providing location-specific maps to find enemies. The GPS will be updated through the Internet with data stored on the memory stick. Sounds like we might have to find one of these for ourselves. Now, if only we had a GPS. . .*

Putting Basic Needs Over the PS3? Madness!

This is in reply to Bill Lipp's letter in Issue #109 (October 2006), particularly the line: "Adults with real jobs should not even complain—they probably make about $500 in a week."

Well, dear Bill, I'm one of those $500/week complainers. Got a news flash for you, Billy Boy: In addition to a real job, I also have real bills, something I don't think you have at your wise old age of 15. But here's a sampling of what you have to look forward to in a couple of years:

- Rent
- Electricity
- Heat
- Car payments
- Internet
- Cable
- Phone
- Credit cards

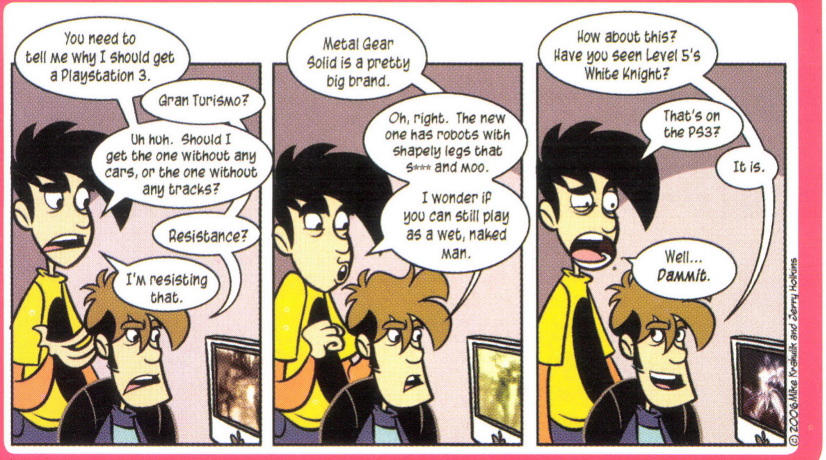
And oh, yeah—a little something called food. While you're working for a videogame system, your parents, who are spending much of their $500/week to support themselves and you, are supporting your entire life.

More than half of my weekly salary goes to pay those expenses listed above so yeah, a $600 videogame system is a big pill to swallow. As of right now, there's no way I can afford it. I have other things, like a eating and putting a roof over my head, that come first.

I hope I meet you someday in about eight years, when you have a real job and real bills, so I can ask you about dropping over half a grand for a new system.
Tony Pecchia
Via e-mail

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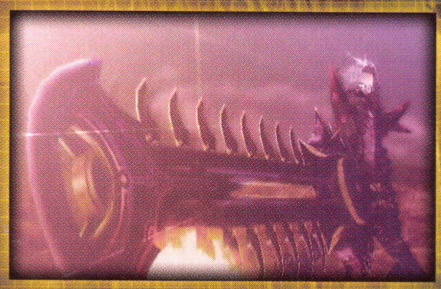
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It's the most popular podcast in Tom Byron's office: radiOPM, serving up delicious views and dialogue from the *OPM* editors every Thursday afternoon. Recent episodes have been rife with talk of the PS3 as the November 17th launch date inches nearer and nearer. Guest Mike Gallo, producer or Sega's *Full Auto 2*, revealed some juicy details about how the game will run online. Plus, we got more PS3 hands-on time at Sony's Gamers' Day. Check out all the radiOPM fun at radiOPM.1UP.com.

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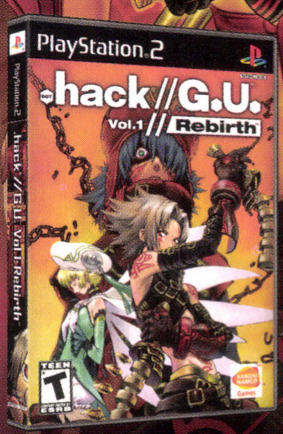
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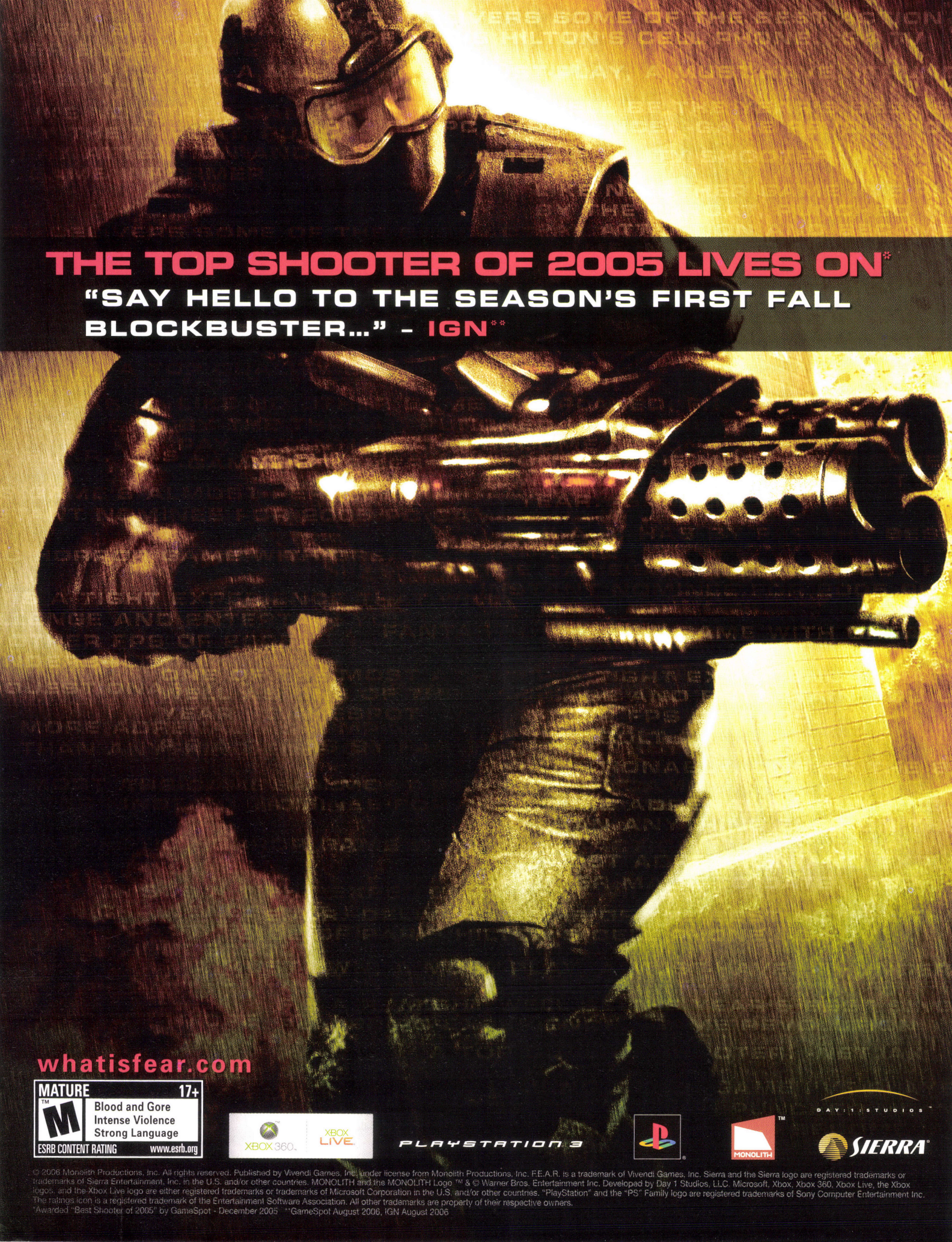


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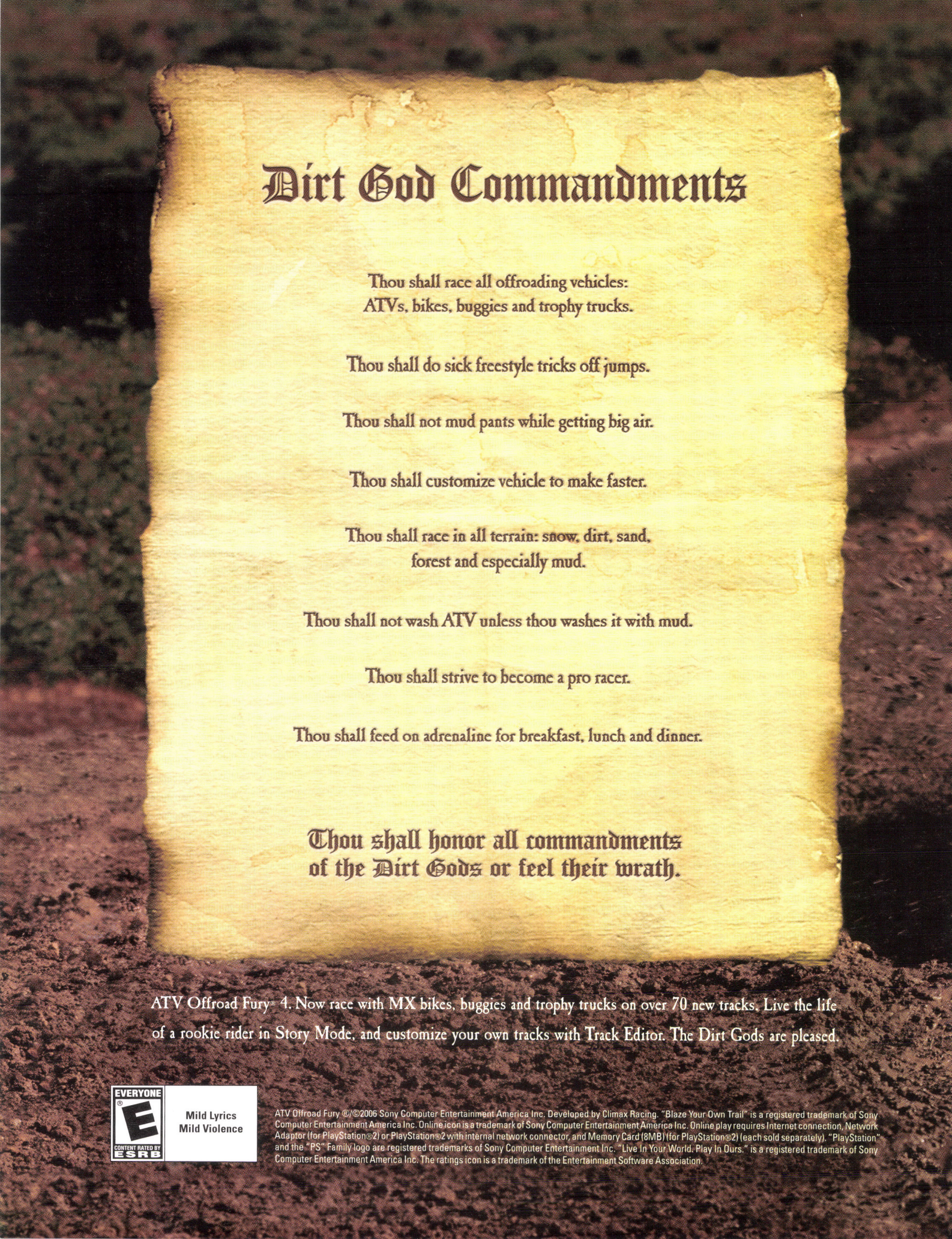
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*Awarded "Best Shooter of 2005" by GameSpot - December 2005 **GameSpot August 2006, IGN August 2006



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Thou shall race all offroading vehicles:
ATVs, bikes, buggies and trophy trucks.
Thou shall do sick freestyle tricks off jumps.
Thou shall not mud pants while getting big air.
Thou shall customize vehicle to make faster.
Thou shall race in all terrain: snow, dirt, sand,
forest and especially mud.
Thou shall not wash ATV unless thou washes it with mud.
Thou shall strive to become a pro racer.
Thou shall feed on adrenaline for breakfast, lunch and dinner.
Thou shall honor all commandments
of the Dirt Gods or feel their wrath.
ATV Offroad Fury® 4. Now race with MX bikes, buggies and trophy trucks on over 70 new tracks. Live the life of a rookie rider in Story Mode, and customize your own tracks with Track Editor. The Dirt Gods are pleased.
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ATV
Offroad Fury 4
BLAZE YOUR OWN TRAIL
ONLINE
BROADBAND AND DIAL-UP
PlayStation 2
LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.

Hype

PREVIEWS AND NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PLAYSTATION

36

ITAGAKI SPEAKS

THE MAN BEHIND NINJA GAIDEN RETURNS TO THE PLAYSTATION

32 CLOVER CLOSES
Where will they go?

34 BIG PICTURE
PS3 is the new PS2.

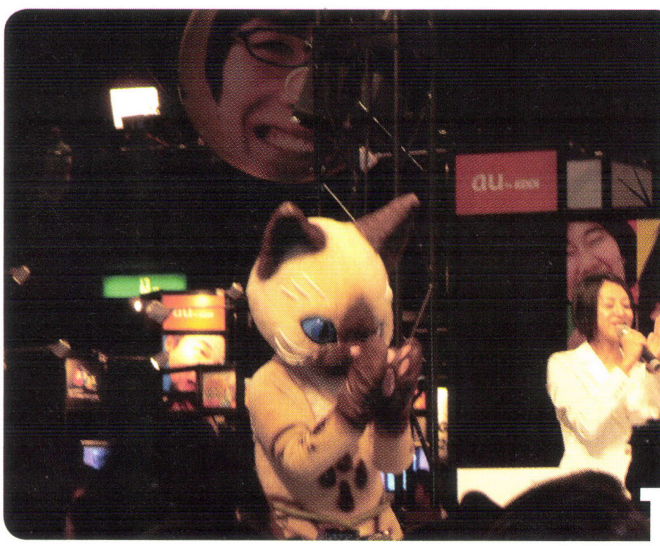
40 J-TOWN
Ninjas have to eat, too.

42 PAUSE
When you're not playing games.

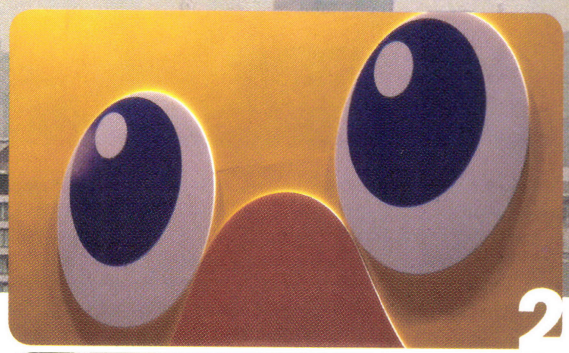
43 TRENDSPOTTER
Have cash to spare?

44 CALENDAR
Set the date.

Another year, another Tokyo Game Show filled with crazy sights, sounds, and, of course, cosplayers. Here are some of our most memorable moments from this year's show.







1
This giant cat is clapping with delight at the thought of getting to murder the person responsible for putting him or her in a giant cat suit.

2
O mighty wall chocobo, why do you look so forlorn? Is it because of the PS3 auctions on eBay? It's OK, buddy—we understand.

3
Ah, yes—what would a TGS be without the cosplayers? A crappy TGS, that's what. Still, some of them could've picked better characters to portray.

4
This may look like an ordinary bowl of ramen, and it is indeed an ordinary bowl of ramen. *OPM*'s TGS coverage: powered by ramen!

5
Our fearless leader with Sony's fearless leader. What you can't see here is that Tom is wearing shorts and holding a 40 in his right hand.

6
Sony Worldwide Studios president Phil Harrison gets mobbed by the press at Sony's headquarters in Tokyo.

7
If you're wondering how packed TGS was this year, this was the stage show for Hiroyuki Kobayashi of Capcom. It was impossible to walk through.

8
Now, that's more like it. A cosplayer dons the Old Snake costume, but we're pretty sure Snake doesn't need floaties to swim.

9
Pac-Man creator Toru Iwatani explains to the audience that he once ate a sandwich "this big." Nobody believes him.

10
One more cosplayer picture to show that the Japanese do the whole cosplay thing better than anyone else on the planet.



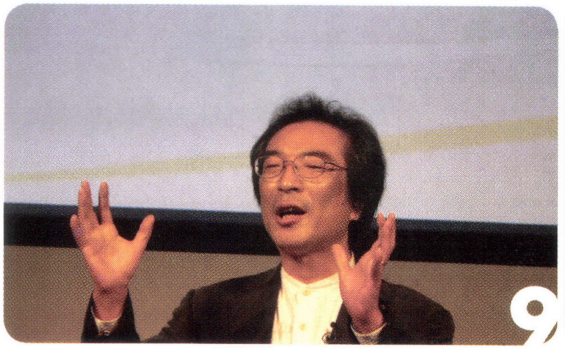














WANTED:

Talented Game Designers

Former Clover Studio designers are on the job hunt

Clover Studio—a subsidiary of Capcom—will be shut down as of March 2007, as Capcom decided that consolidation of properties would be the best approach to move forward into next-generation development. Clover Studio had three major creative minds; two of them decided that they wouldn't be rejoining Capcom, while the third will remain at the company on a contracted basis. But with so much talent, we can't help but speculate where these free agents should go and what positions they're best suited for.



Atsushi Inaba

Who is he? Former CEO of Clover Studio and producer responsible for *Viewtiful Joe* and *Steel Battalion*.

Rumors of where he's going: There's already speculation that Inaba will simply form another new studio.

What we want him to do: Given that Inaba has experience as a studio head, it's likely that he'll form his own development house—unless he can find a similarly high position elsewhere. Unfortunately, it's become harder and harder these days for an independent studio to get up and running, and we'd hate to see Inaba go through another studio closure, so we can only hope that he ends up at a place where there's plenty of job security and plenty of freedom to let the man create whatever he wants. Such a place might be Yoshiki Okamoto's Game Republic. Okamoto's a former producer at Capcom and the creator of *Street Fighter II*; his development team worked on the original *Genji* with Sony's internal teams.



Hideki Kamiya

Who is he? Former director at Clover Studio and the man behind some of Capcom's biggest games, including *Viewtiful Joe*, *Resident Evil 2*, *Okami*, and *Devil May Cry*.

Rumors of where he's going: He might follow Inaba to a new studio or wait some time before jumping back into game development.

What we want him to do: Kamiya likes to stay out of the spotlight, even though his previous work suggests that he should be hogging it. As such, Kamiya likely won't form his own studio, so we could see him easily joining one of the bigger companies. One that jumps to mind is Konami, where Kamiya's talent for creating memorable characters and equally memorable gaming experiences would probably be put to good use. Just imagine Kamiya working on *Zone of the Enders 3* or a new *Silent Hill*. Yeah, we think it's a good fit, too.



Shinji Mikami

Who is he? Currently a contracted employee at Capcom who has served as producer on *God Hand* and director on *Resident Evil 4*.

Rumors of where he's going: Nowhere, for now—Mikami has chosen to remain as a contracted employee of Capcom.

What we want him to do: Honestly, Mikami needs to stay with Capcom. While some big-name producers such as Keiji Inafune (creator of the *Mega Man* series) and Hiroyuki Kobayashi (producer on *Resident Evil 4*, currently working on *Devil May Cry 4*) remain at the company, Mikami brings an attitude to game development that other members of the Capcom staff could learn from. Still, we hope that Capcom gives him an opportunity to continue working on brand-new properties and that he won't be stuck doing *Resident Evil* games for the rest of his life.



Playstation Bits

Byte-sized news

Rockstar won't be bullied anymore. A judge in Florida's Third District Court of Appeals ordered Rockstar to show him *Bully* before it shipped to stores in order to determine if it should or should not be released. After sitting down with a Rockstar representative and watching various portions of the game, the judge decided that "there's nothing in the game that you wouldn't see on TV every night," and that *Bully*'s arrival in stores could go ahead as planned.

Elsewhere, if you wanted to preorder a PS3 at EB or GameStop, you're out of luck. Preorder sales have been sold out, so you'll have to hit up one of several other chains if you want a piece of the action on launch day—not bad for a system that's supposed to be too expensive for the masses. Lastly, Sony says that a drop on the PSP's $250 price tag won't happen anytime soon. Instead, you can expect to see more bundled deals in the coming months.



Game Envy

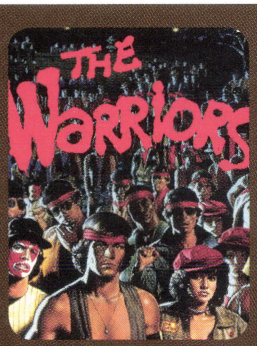
Grim Fandango

The point-and-click adventure game had its shining moments back in the '90s before it shriveled away into oblivion. The highlight of them all was *Grim Fandango*, Tim Schafer's masterpiece for LucasArts. The game stars Manuel "Manny" Calavera, whose job as the Grim Reaper has him selling afterlife travel packages. However, he soon realizes that someone is tampering with the system and heads off to figure out what's afoot. The excellent story, beautiful design, and film-noir atmosphere all combined to make this one of the best games ever. And we figure that if the PSP is going to be a dumping ground for ports, why not actually start porting over some good games that would translate well to the PSP's control system?

Warriors PSP

Rockstar takes the Coney Island cuties to handheld

Rockstar Games takes the PSP seriously, as the company has proven with the two *GTA* games it's crafted for Sony's handheld. Now Rockstar is bringing its critically acclaimed PS2 adventure-brawler *The Warriors* (*OPM* scored it a 9/10) to the PSP. Watch for the game sometime in December.



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The big picture

A look back at the future

by John Davison

In a fit of launch-driven nostalgia, I've been rooting through old articles on my hard drive this past month, and I stumbled upon all the files from the November 2000 issue of this very magazine. Why is that significant? Well, it was the issue that served the same purpose as this one for the previous generation: namely the big arrival declaration, plus plenty of vindication for early adopters thanks to Sony's vigorous assertions about its vision for the new platform.

Lots of things have changed for us in the media in the past six years, particularly when it comes to the breadth of options that gamers have for sourcing information, but it seems that the PlayStation message is actually still very much the same.

A quote from SCEA boss Kaz Hirai opened our big launch feature that month. "PlayStation 2 is the future of entertainment," he said boldly, announcing the central theme of the coverage that we would consequently provide. "Since it was first shown in Tokyo," our editorial lead continued, "Sony's decision makers have been keen to stress the system as a 'computer entertainment' box."

"Aside from being a powerful games system," we continued, "the long-term intention seems to be to push it further, to make the system your way of interacting with all kinds of entertainment, from the obvious, like the games that we feature [...] to DVD movies and eventually to online content that will allow you to take part in live game shows, online tournaments and huge interactive worlds. The next five years or so will see Sony push its 'digital entertainment' strategy through the PS2. We'll see the system driving all manner of entertainment forms and once broadband Internet connections become more widespread we'll see it as a hub for downloading all manner of content from the Web. It's no secret that entertainment visionaries like Steven Spielberg and George Lucas have been paying close attention to the PS2, and in the years to come we'll see the fruits of their visions."

It all sounds very familiar, doesn't it? In fact we could tweak a few words and pass it off as coverage of the PS3 without anyone batting an eyelid. We've often joked around here (and I think Joe mentioned something along these lines in his column a few months ago) that the promises of a new system are never delivered on until the following generation launches, and the PS3 could very well be the ultimate expression of that.

While the PS2 wasn't ready to deliver on this, the PS3 is...

The PS3 is certainly in a much better place to be more of a digital entertainment box than its predecessor, and it will no doubt finally deliver on the more connected experience that Sony discussed six years ago, but that's not what makes it a "next-gen" box. To be honest, I don't think it's really the graphics it pumps out either. *MotorStorm* and *Lair* and *Devil May Cry 4* and *Ridge Racer 7* are all beautiful games—but are they really "next-gen" experiences? No, probably not. They have the pretty stuff nailed, but where's the meat?

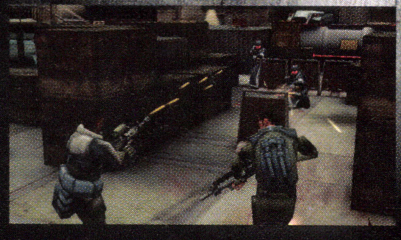
For that we need to return to another set of promises from the early days of the PS2. When the PlayStation 2 launched, Sony Computer Entertainment introduced a new concept it called "Emotion Synthesis." According to SCE, Emotion Synthesis "allows the system to simulate not just how the images look, but how the characters and objects in a game think, act, and behave." Amid the "power of a supercomputer" hype, we were led to believe that the PS2's Emotion Engine CPU was so mind-bogglingly potent that game characters would display discernable behavior patterns and even simulate emotional responses. While it arguably never fully delivered on the promise, it does provide a glimpse at what may very well be the single most important thing about the PS3 and its generation.

The boss of a very well respected game studio told me recently that the new generation "isn't about pretty graphics or the HD generation or any of that stuff. It's about content." When I pressed him, he explained that it wasn't building a huge environment and filling it with stuff, it was filling it with characters and making them believable. It was telling a great story and being able to convey emotion. While the PS2 wasn't ready to deliver on this, the PS3 is, and while games that truly represent this generation aren't available at launch, they are going to come sooner than you think. As ever, to see the true potential of a new system, we have to look back at the promises of its predecessor.

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PSP PlayStation Portable

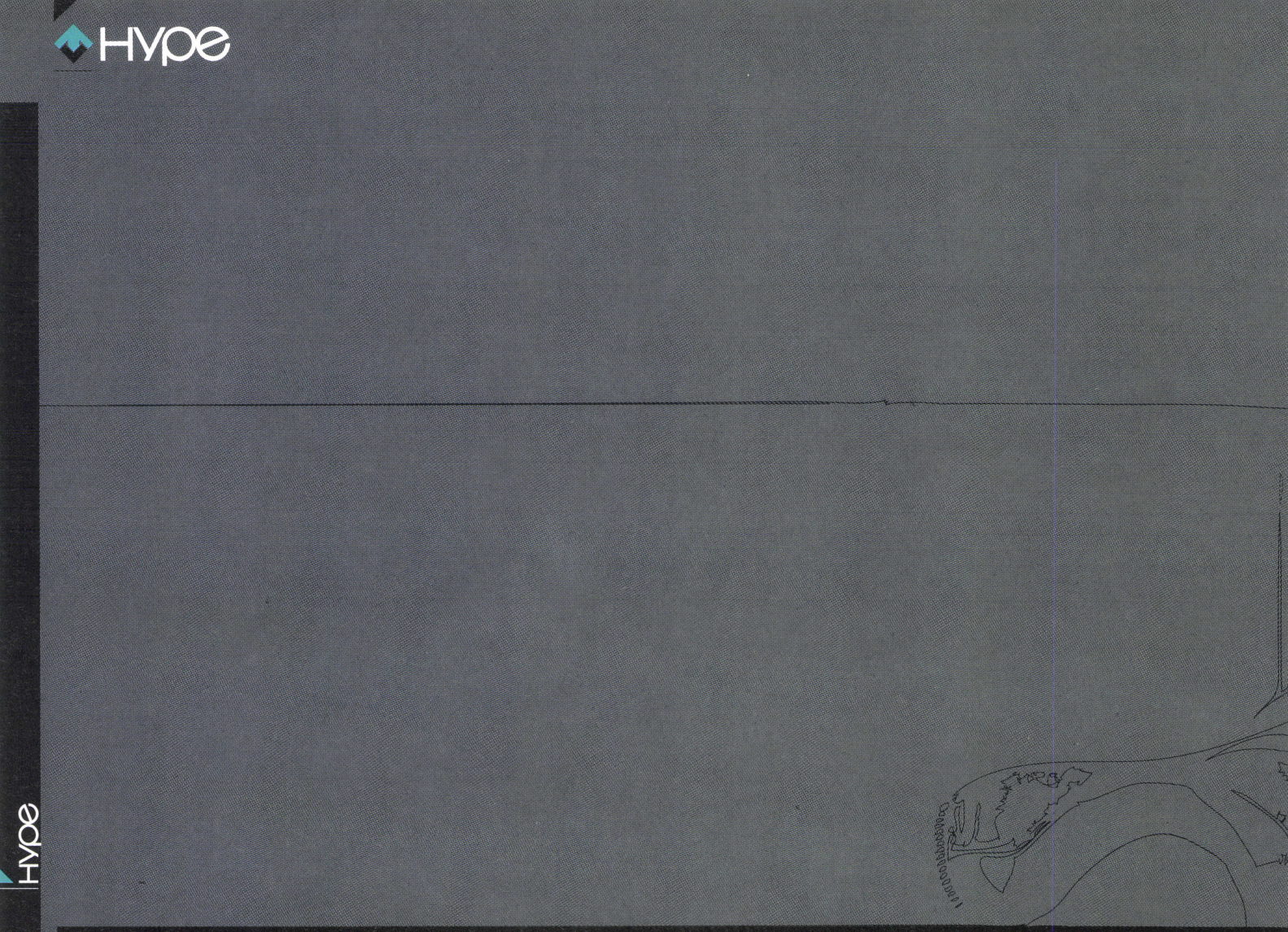
GUERRILLA

KILLZONE.COM

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Language
Violence

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OPM INTERVIEW

TOMONOBU ITAGAKI

TECMO'S MASTER NINJA

Yes, that's right—Tomonobu Itagaki is gracing the pages of *OPM*. While his studio, Team Ninja, is known for Xbox-centric titles like the *Dead or Alive* series and *Ninja Gaiden* (which is often cited as the best action game of the current generation), Itagaki has often commented that he wants to develop games for powerful systems, and it seems like the PS3 has met his approval (check out our *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* preview on page 88). One thing you'll notice about Itagaki is that he's not like most Japanese developers. He's not afraid of speaking his mind (he says, "I am now in a position where people want to hear what I have to say, and it would be a disservice to not be honest with my thoughts"), he dresses like a rock star, and he even controls his interviews (he'll often take the questions and answers along his own train of thought—and he sometimes flat-out refuses to answer questions he thinks are dumb). We didn't talk much *Ninja Gaiden*, but we did get to hear about his work ethic and how he's preparing the next generation of designers at Team Ninja.







Ninja Gaiden Sigma running on the PlayStation 3



ITAGAKI INTERROGATES OPM

Itagaki is something of a camera nut, as he's admitted to buying no less than eight Canon cameras in the past two years. And in an example of how different Itagaki is from other Japanese developers, he started asking us questions at the beginning of the interview.

| **TI** Hey, what kind of camera is that?
| **OPM** It's a Panasonic Lumix.

| **TI** Lumix? Ah. Why are you using Panasonic?
| **OPM** Oh, because of the good Leica lens in it.

| **TI** I see—so, about $300, $400?
| **OPM** Yeah, I paid about $350.

| **TI** Carry on.

| **OPM** What got you into making games in the first place?
| **TOMONOBU ITAGAKI** I've always liked creating things. Back when I was in elementary school, we had this project in one of the classes where we had to imagine an island, and we had to write a story about what happened on this imaginary island. At the time, I was really into books like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Lord of the Flies*, so it was interesting for me to think about what would happen then. And that has continued to this day.

At the time, I wrote about 100 pages for that story. It was a direct copy of *Robinson Crusoe*—but still, I wrote a lot. And no, there were no girls with large breasts in that story.

| **OPM** So you're handing over the reins of *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* to Yousuke Hayashi. What made you think it was time to do that, and what made you select Hayashi as your protégé?
| **TI** First of all, this is the tenth anniversary of Team Ninja, timed from the first *Dead or Alive* game. So these past 10 years, my philosophy has been, "I want to have complete control over everything. And I want to be involved in every decision and know exactly what's going on." And with that philosophy, we've managed to put out approximately a game a year. Which, considering the quality, is pretty fast-paced. But there's no way, really, for us to exceed that for these past 10 years.

And 10 years going forward, for games that I am personally supervising, I don't intend to change that philosophy whatsoever. I'm going to still keep my hands on everything, make all the decisions, and do all the direction, so I can guarantee a good product. And that's not going to change, going forward.

So that's the most important thing, that my philosophy hasn't changed whatsoever. That being said, there's this new platform, the PlayStation 3, out in the marketplace, and it's time for us to examine: "Well, now that there's another piece of hardware capable of doing the kind of quality games that we put out, is there a need or a market for our games on that platform?"

So I'm going to continue doing the work and put my heart and soul into every game I make going forward. But, at the same time, if a young director on our team comes to me and says, "I want to expand what we're doing and include more people; I want more people to experience our game," and he wants to do that with a game that's been out for more than two years but is still well known as one of the best games in that genre, then that's something that has to be considered.



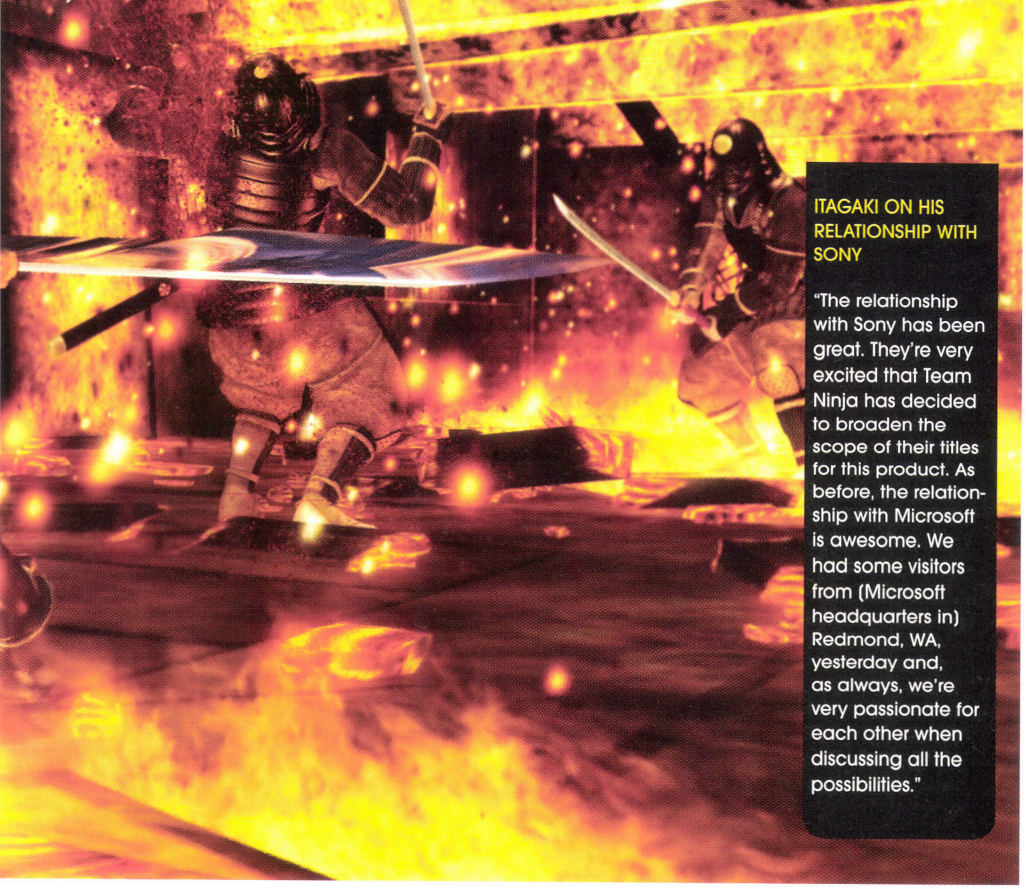
"It's not that I 'chose' him. You can't just 'choose' people for greatness."

Every artist begins learning how to draw by imitating other artists. Hayashi, acting as project lead for *Ninja Gaiden Black*, was able to, in a sense, "copy" what I made with *Ninja Gaiden* and understand what makes it tick. And now this is his chance to use that knowledge and create *Ninja Gaiden Sigma*, which is not a mere copy; it is an extension. And it needs to be better than the original. And you asked, "Why did I choose Hayashi as my successor?" It's not that I "chose" him. You can't just "choose" people for greatness. If *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* turns out well, then he will have proven himself as a next-generation game creator. It doesn't matter how much I say that I've chosen this person; if the results aren't there, then it's meaningless.

It's not that he's replacing me by any means; it's not like he's becoming the new boy or new face of Team Ninja whatsoever. But, ultimately, he's going to have to prove himself with what he does, and he has to be the spokesman for his own creation. And I believe he has the capacity to do that, and that's why I chose him, which I will further explain now.

My reason for choosing Hayashi to lead up this project is simple. It took us four years to make *Ninja Gaiden*. That's a long period of time. Within four years, you have some people get married or have kids; for whatever reason, they leave the company. I'll say something here that I've never said before: Almost half of the team that was working on *Ninja Gaiden* quit before they could see its completion.

| **OPM** How did it get finished?
| **TI** There was a period in its development where even the people that were still there started to lose faith in it ever being done. And that's when I stood up and yelled at the entire team, and I said, "I don't care how many corpses I have to walk over; I'm going to make this game the best it can be, and I'm going to put it out there. Those of you who want to come with me can. Those who don't, you're free to leave anytime." And the first person to raise his hand and say that he was with me was Hayashi. So it just goes to show



ITAGAKI ON HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH SONY

"The relationship with Sony has been great. They're very excited that Team Ninja has decided to broaden the scope of their titles for this product. As before, the relationship with Microsoft is awesome. We had some visitors from (Microsoft headquarters in) Redmond, WA, yesterday and, as always, we're very passionate for each other when discussing all the possibilities."

how weak humans can be, and how as soon as something doesn't go their way, they give up and move onto the next thing. Hayashi is the kind of guy that never gives up. So, while he has a long road ahead of him, I'm confident that he's going to do what's right.

| **OPM** Sounds like you were trying to motivate the team.
| **TI** It's important to stick with what you promise that you want to do. I wouldn't have stood up and said those kinds of things to my team if I thought that it wasn't their fault. If it's because of bad leadership, that's one thing. But when you have people that are complaining, despite the fact that they lack ability and get into petty bickering, I have no problem with telling those people to get lost. And that's why I think Hayashi was a good choice: because he's a real man; once he says he'll do something, he'll follow through.

If there's one type of [person] I can't stand, it's guys who lie, who make excuses, and who are weak. And if you do any of these things, you can't fulfill your obligations while working at a development studio such as Team Ninja. As a leader, you have to make a decision about who has those qualities and who doesn't. That's the long and short of it, and I believe Hayashi possesses qualities and has the ability to discern those who do and don't.

Are you guys convinced that I made the right choice?

| **OPM** So far, from the *NGS* footage and our talk with Hayashi, it looks like you made the right choice. Earlier, you talked about who you can't stand. On the flip side, is there any particular person that you do respect, then?
| **TI** Just to clear up any confusion, I said that I don't like people who lie and make excuses, but that doesn't necessarily mean that I love people that don't. It's only natural that when you're working with somebody, you shouldn't lie or make excuses. It's just a logical matter.

| **OPM** Well, to clarify a bit further, what person would you respect, and why?
| **TI** Ah, hmm. I'd have to say that people I respect are people who create something amazing. Something that I wouldn't be able to do is worthy of my respect.

Speaking industrywise, the reverse of that is—as far as the type of games Team Ninja makes—there isn't anybody like that. We're aiming to be No. 1. That then means that, of the people making games that are outside the genre we work in, there are definitely people that I respect.

| **OPM** Is there a game that you wish that you had made?
| **TI** No. I haven't looked much at the past; it's all about the result. You look at what's come out, and you just think, "Hmm, I like this game" or, "Hey, this is a piece of crap." You just look at the result. You don't think back and go "Oh, I wish I had made this game."

| **OPM** So which game do you look back at and just say, "Oh, this is a piece of crap"?
| **TI** Well, yeah, there are a lot of games that I think are crap. But the only one I think I'm able to say out loud is *Tekken*.

| **OPM** If you went to a bar right now, what would you order as your drink?
| **TI** Beer.

| **OPM** Any particular beer?
| **TI** Whatever.



NEXT-GEN LOOKS

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#1 RATED NHL GAME*

NHL NHLPA

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*According to GameRankings.com average scores of 2003 - 2006 hockey video games.

3TOWN

Hamburgers and ninjas



Tomonobu Itagaki with former *XBN* editor David Chen, a random woman, and James "Buttery Steak" Mielke.

It was an odd meeting for me to be having with Team Ninja head Tomonobu Itagaki during the week of this year's Tokyo Game Show. The fiercely independent, pro-Xbox developer was discussing Team Ninja's announcement to bring the *Ninja Gaiden* franchise to the PlayStation 3 (*Ninja Gaiden Sigma*, in case you haven't heard), a significant event, considering the developer hasn't put a game on Sony hardware since *DOA 2: Hardcore* back in the fall of 2000. The decision to develop for the PS3, he says, arose when one of his team (partly responsible for development of Ninja Gaiden's battle system) came to him and suggested creating the ultimate version of the game for the PS3. Itagaki agreed, mostly because it could be done with a new, internal extension of Team Ninja, without detracting from Xbox 360 development.

Personally, I think this kills multiple birds with one stone. First off, Team Ninja can get to grips with PS3 development without having to design an all-new game from scratch. While the team's creating an entirely new graphics engine for *Sigma*, the level design, principal boss battles, overall battle system, plot, and dialogue are already in place. This saves Team Ninja from having to conjure up a wholly original game while the developer's big guns finish work on *Dead or Alive: Xtreme 2* for the Xbox 360. That's not to suggest that *Sigma* will be half-assed. Far from it. Although it might be hard to imagine a game looking much better than *Ninja Gaiden Black*, *Sigma* definitely does the trick. Now everything looks like it's nearly CG quality, and that's saying something. Plus, you can factor in stuff like new enemies that attack you from atop motorcycles, real water battles (*Ninja Gaiden* protagonist Ryu runs and fights on water now), new bosses like Gamov, and—best of all—a playable Rachel, who now earns her keep instead of just standing around in bondage gear.

Itagaki asked if he could borrow MGS' Raiden for an appearance in Ninja Gaiden.

After our interview, Itagaki and I went out to grab a bite to eat at a local spoon near Tecmo's Tokyo offices—our meals consisted of hamburger steaks seemingly drowned in butter with potatoes on the side. The man scarfed his food down with alarming speed, but he's so slim, I'm not really sure where it goes. I think his mouth is actually a gateway to an alternate dimension, a galaxy filled with myriad things, including buttery hamburger steaks, chewed up and stored as fuel to be used at a later date. That must be why he can work such long hours as he does (he usually gets into work around 5 p.m. and leaves at 7 a.m., or something like that).

But, *Ninja Gaiden* is coming to Sony's console, and PS3 owners will undoubtedly be getting the most insane version yet—that's one more reason for me to buy a PS3. Itagaki also did a podcast with *Metal Gear Solid* director Hideo Kojima at TGS where the two talked about all kinds of things, like Itagaki asking (perhaps jokingly) if he could borrow *MGS'* Raiden for an appearance in *Ninja Gaiden Sigma*. Now wouldn't that be something?



More Milky

If you can't get enough of the inimitable James Mielke—and frankly, we're pretty sure you can't—head on over to milkman.1up.com to hear more about his zany adventures in Japan, his life as a model, and his musical tastes. Be sure to take special notice of his unbridled hate for San Francisco, as well.

The Madden Curse Strikes

Cover athletes fear for their lives!

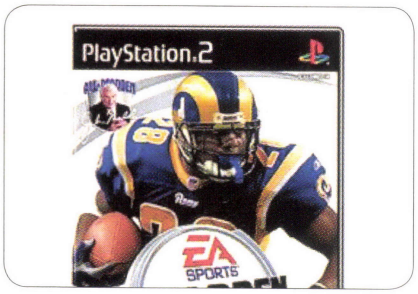
If you haven't heard about the Madden Curse, here's the deal: Every year, EA Sports selects a player for the cover of its *Madden* game—usually, it's someone with talent. There's a theory that whoever appears on the cover, along with the team he's associated with, usually has a disastrous season. It's been debated how long the curse has been going on, but it's been affecting players and teams for at least six years. Here are a few pieces of evidence suggesting that the Curse is real.



Daunte Culpepper

Quarterback, Minnesota Vikings
Madden NFL 2002 cover athlete

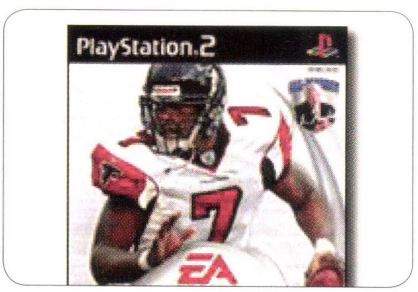
What happened: Daunte Culpepper's punishment for being the *Madden* cover star wasn't so bad, considering the season he had. He threw for over 2,500 yards and had completed 235 passes before suffering from a knee injury that knocked him out near the tail end of the season. However, the Vikings' overall record at that time was 4-7—that, combined with the injury, heralded yet another storm of Madden Curse controversy.



Marshall Faulk

Running back, St. Louis Rams
Madden NFL 2003 cover athlete

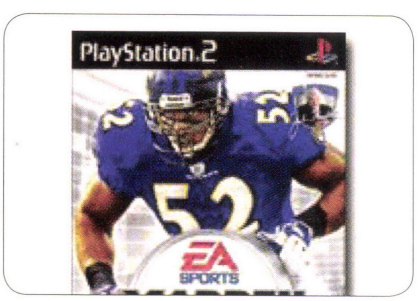
What happened: Marshall probably felt the effects of the Curse more than any other player. Not only did he get hit with an ankle injury that season, which caused him to miss a few games and only start in 10 of the 14 contests in which he played, but he also rushed for less than 1,000 yards—and hasn't rushed over 1,000 yards since 2001, the season before he was *Madden NFL 2003*'s cover athlete.



Michael Vick

Quarterback, Atlanta Falcons
Madden NFL 2004 cover athlete

What happened: Vick's problems with the Curse are probably the most notorious due to the huge amount of hype behind him as a player. Unfortunately for Vick, there wasn't enough hype to heal a fractured right fibula that caused him to miss most of the season. The rest of the Falcons didn't fare much better. The team went 5-11 in 2003.



Ray Lewis

Linebacker, Baltimore Ravens
Madden NFL 2005 cover athlete

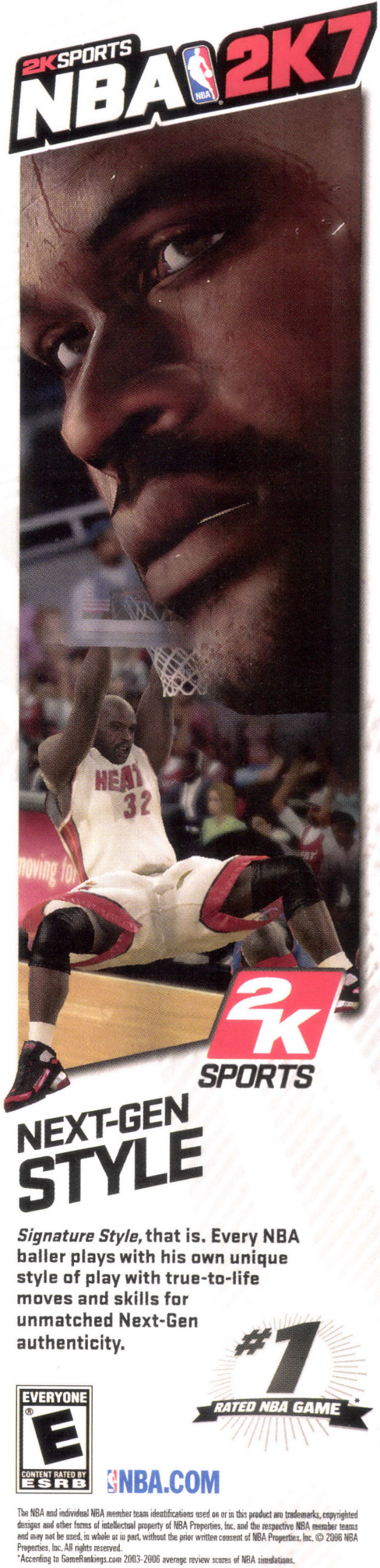
What happened: For Lewis, it seemed to take a little while for the Curse to kick in. He didn't have a terrible year in 2004 by any means, but he did receive a wrist injury late in the season. The Curse seemed to have more of an immediate effect on the rest of the team, with the Ravens missing the playoffs. However, Lewis would suffer a far more serious injury in the 2005 season.



Shaun Alexander

Running back, Seattle Seahawks
Madden NFL 2007 cover athlete

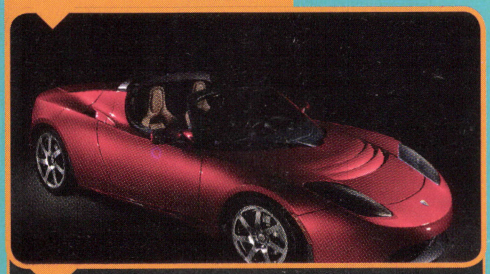
What happened: Alexander was injured in the first game of the season. He was initially diagnosed with a chipped bone in his foot, but this "chipped bone" was later revealed to be an outright fracture. Though we have to give props to Alexander, who initially tried to fight off the injury before being shelved, the power of the Curse is just too great.



pause

When you're not playing games

feel



Tesla Roadster

www.teslamotors.com

Tired of paying $80 to fill up your car? If you drove the Tesla Roadster, those days would be over, because this car is electric. And unlike most electric cars, it has power under the hood—it can go from 0 to 60 in about four seconds, and each charge lasts for 250 miles. It doesn't really matter that the price tag is $100,000, because the first batch of 100 (slated to come out next spring) has already been sold. You just have to find one and then carjack it, which means it's effectively free*!

*"Free" does not take into account the potential price of a prison stint for grand theft auto.

hear



Construction

misterexcavator.1UP.com

Ah, the soothing sounds of big cranes and excavators as they pound giant rocks and I-beams into bits right in your backyard. Take it from the staff of *OPM*: This ambient noise is beneficial no matter what you're doing, whether it be composing a 1,000-word manifesto on the glories of American-developed fighting games a decade past their prime or sneaking a midafternoon catnap. Go find a construction site near you and experience it for yourself.

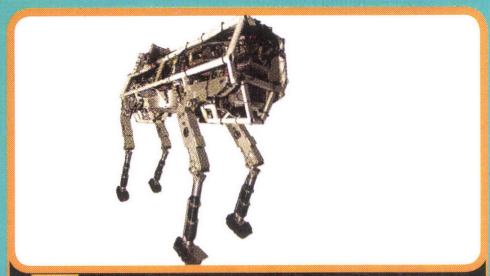
see



Criminal

www.marvel.com

This new comic series from writer Ed Brubaker and artist Sean Phillips, the creative team behind *Sleeper*, focuses on criminals in the real world. The first story arc is a mix of *Heat* and *The Grifters*, centering on the classic "retired master thief gets pulled into one last big score" formula; there are enough subtle twists for the story to feel fresh. While each arc is a complete story, the series draws on its own little universe to tell many stories, much like James Ellroy or George Pelecanos.



BigDog

www.bostondynamics.com

It's official: The human race is now obsolete. At least, that's our reaction on seeing BigDog, the latest robot developed by Boston Dynamics. This four-legged robot is kind of like a pack mule of death, able to walk across all kinds of terrain—including snow and mud—with ease. It even remains upright when someone kicks it. Check out videos of it in action, and then figure out a plan for how we're going to overthrow these things after they rule the world.



Yo La Tengo

www.yolatengo.com

We were drawn to this prolific band's latest album for the title alone—*I Am Not Afraid of You and I Will Beat Your Ass*—so the fact that it's a really great set of tunes is a bonus. Although that's not surprising, given Yo La Tengo's intelligent, lo-fi, Americana-ish vibe. These 15 tracks see them returning to a more-rock-less-pop sound than their albums of the previous few years. We recommend it for a good road trip—peppy enough to keep you awake and happy enough to help dial back the road rage.



For Your Consideration

www.imdb.com

Christopher Guest's delicious mockery of humanity had us at *This is Spinal Tap*, so we're superexcited that he has a new movie out. This film's target is the awards mania that sweeps the movie industry every year; in addition to featuring regular cast members such as Catherine O'Hara, Parker Posey, and Eugene Levy, *For Your Consideration* also introduces new faces, including *OPM* fave Ricky Gervais, god of all things *Office*-like. We rate this movie 11.

Trendspotter

PlayStation 3 Auctions!

Buy! Buy! Buy! Unfortunately, a small portion of the people who marched out to preorder PS3s did so for the sole purpose of turning around to auction them on eBay for a hefty profit. While we don't officially condone or condemn the practice, we have to admit that it'd be a little weird to shell out $1,500 for what amounts to a piece of paper and someone's guarantee that you're getting the system on November 17th or thereabouts.



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*According to GameRankings.com 2003-2006 average review scores of College Basketball video games.

december 2006

It's that time of the month!

MONDAY

4 Just because Led Zeppelin broke up **26** years ago doesn't mean you can't have a "Whole Lotta Love" for them.
25 Sadly, your naughtiness or niceness is going to factor a whole lot less into whether Santa brings you a PS3 than your parents' ability to wait in lines for many days.

TUESDAY

5 Slap that camouflage skin on your PSP, and get all military with *Brothers in Arms* and *Rainbow Six Vegas*.
19 The holiday break kicks in next week, so stock up your PS3 library with today's release of *NBA Live 07*.
26 Celebrate Boxing Day by indulging in a little *Fight Night Round 3*.

WEDNESDAY

6 The first edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* was published in 1768; one day later, the first school paper was copied from it.
20 Bend a spoon in honor of Uri Geller, who turns 60 today.

THURSDAY

14 Here's hoping that eight crazy nights (which start tomorrow) include a PS3.
28 Go Hawkeyes! Iowa celebrates its 160th year of being the 29th state.

FRIDAY

8 Let the tradition of crappy video-game-based movies continue with this week's release of *DOA: Dead or Alive*.
22 Want to see an actor desperately try to reclaim his youth? Go see *Rocky Balboa*!
29 Satyrs, evil stepfathers, and crazy magical kingdoms are plenty to get us excited about *Pan's Labyrinth*.

SATURDAY

9 Yesterday's date has proven to be a grim one in the history of rock 'n' roll: John Lennon was assassinated, Dime-bag Darrell was killed on stage, and the Eagles released *Hotel California*.
16 It's Chocolate-Covered Anything Day; pets and small children, beware.

SUNDAY

3 Giancarlo wants you to know that he will be making his world-famous clam chowder for lunch today, and no, you can't have any.
24 *Ultimate* comic book writer Mark Millar turns a marvelous 37.



WHO'S GOT NEXT?

2KSPORTS

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NHL 2K7

COLLEGE HOOPS NCAA 2K7



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PLAYSTATION 3 XBOX XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE

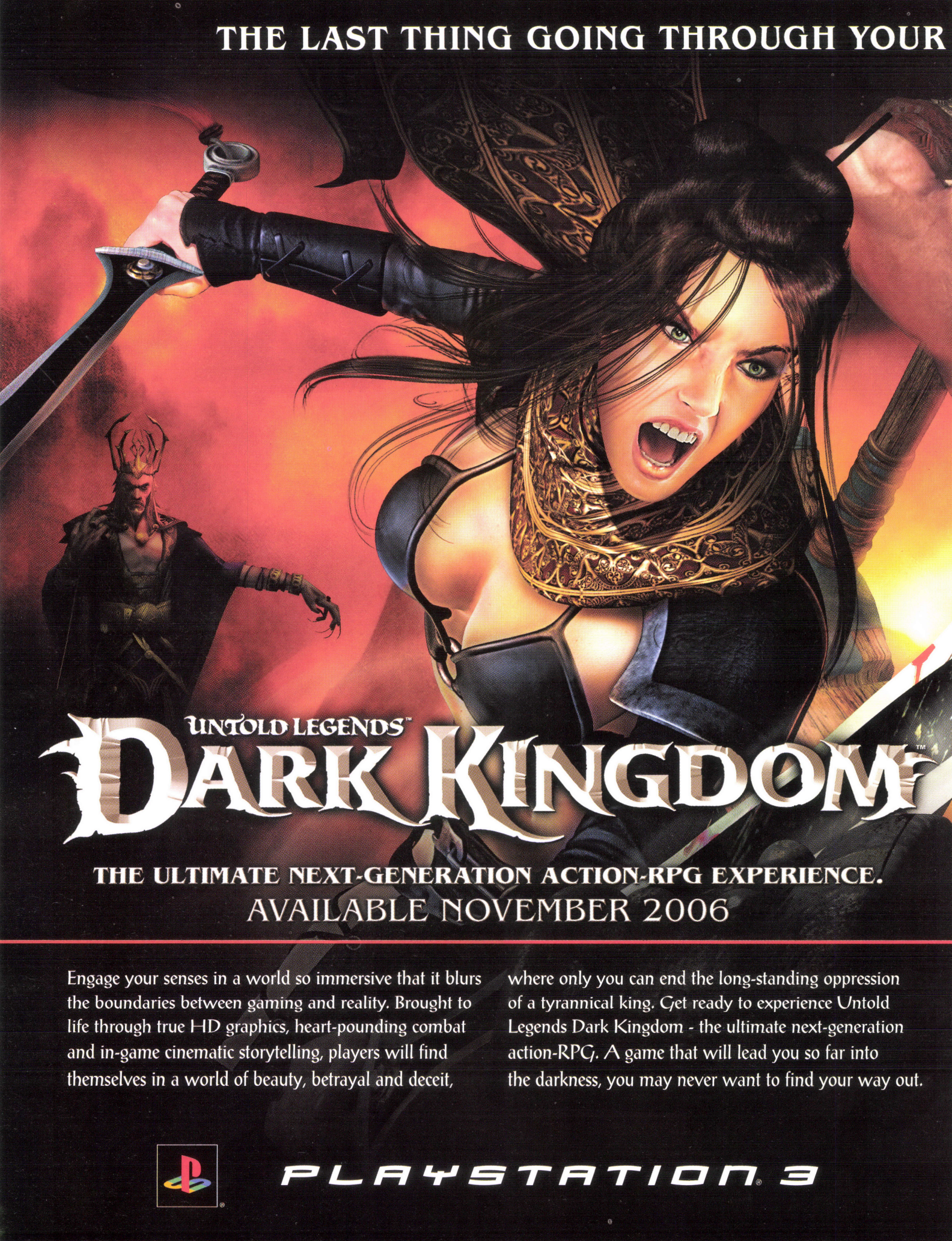
PRODUCTS RANGE FROM RATING PENDING TO EVERYONE 10+

RP-E 10+

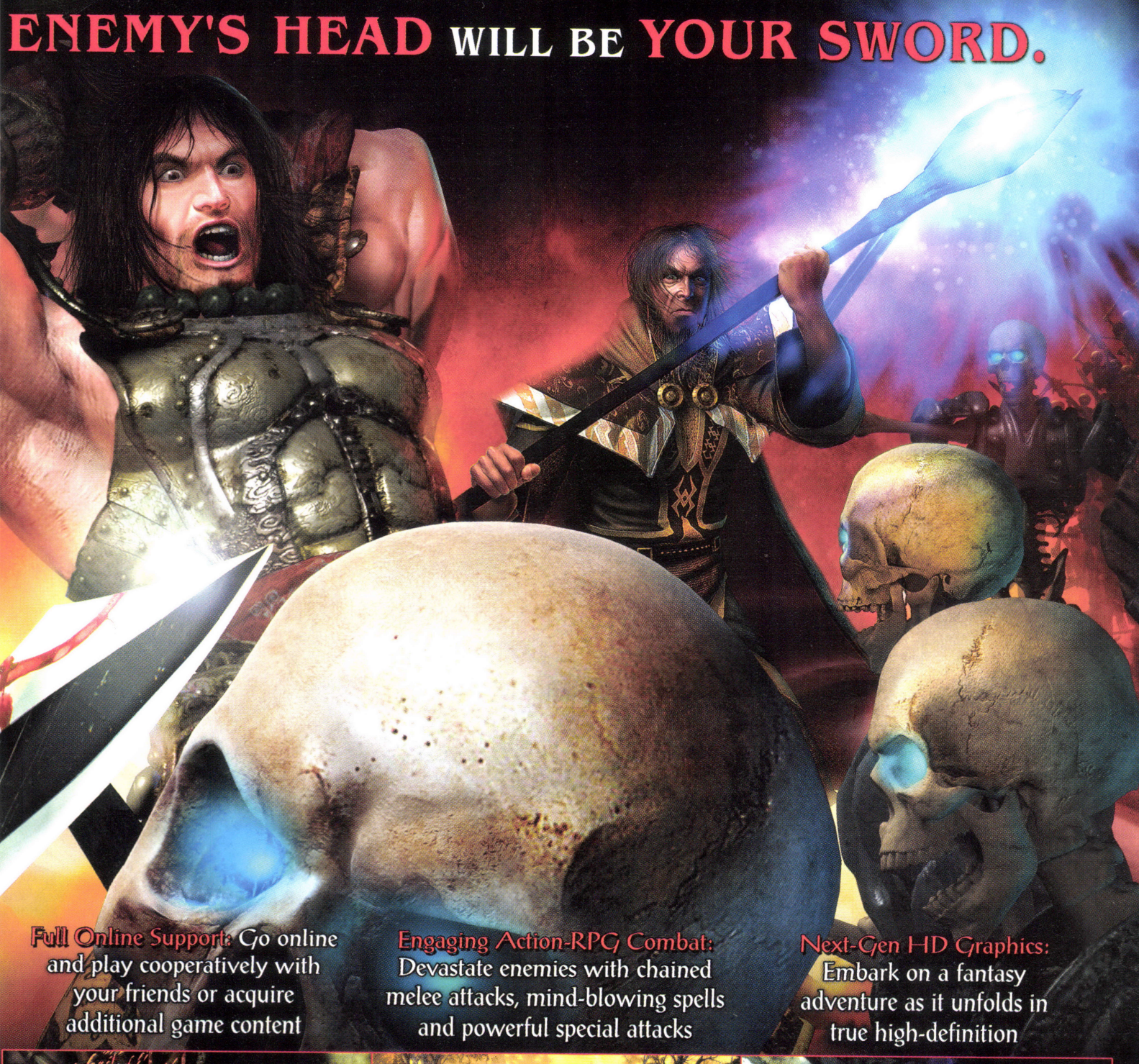
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SOE
SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Violence

Game experience may change during online play.

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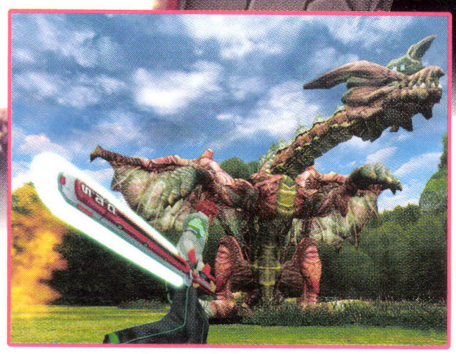
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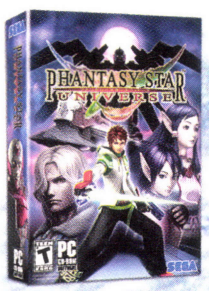
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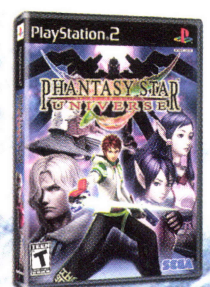


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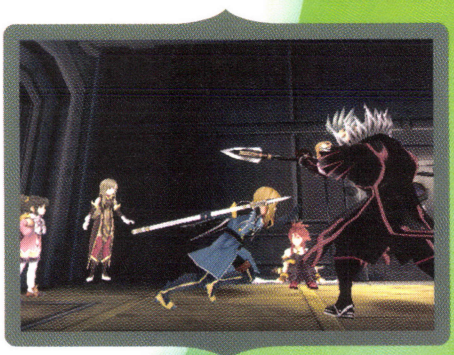
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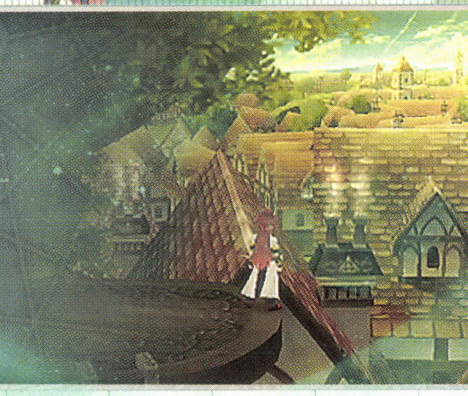






A TALE OF HONOR AND SACRIFICE, DUTY AND CHOICE, WHAT IS WRITTEN AND WHAT WILL BE.

Luke fon Fabre, sole heir to a family of aristocrats was kidnapped seven years ago, and the shock left him with no memories of his life before. He has since led a quiet, boring life within the family's residence, learning little of the world beyond the palace walls. Suddenly thrust into the outside world, Luke is caught in the workings of the Order of Lorelei, keepers of the prophecy known as the Score. No longer sheltered by the palace, Luke must get along in the confusing and often hostile world. He knows nothing about those who might be his friends, or those who already are his enemies. He has not yet noticed the evil that is drawing close to him.



TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Alcohol Reference
Fantasy Violence
Language
Simulated Gambling
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation®2

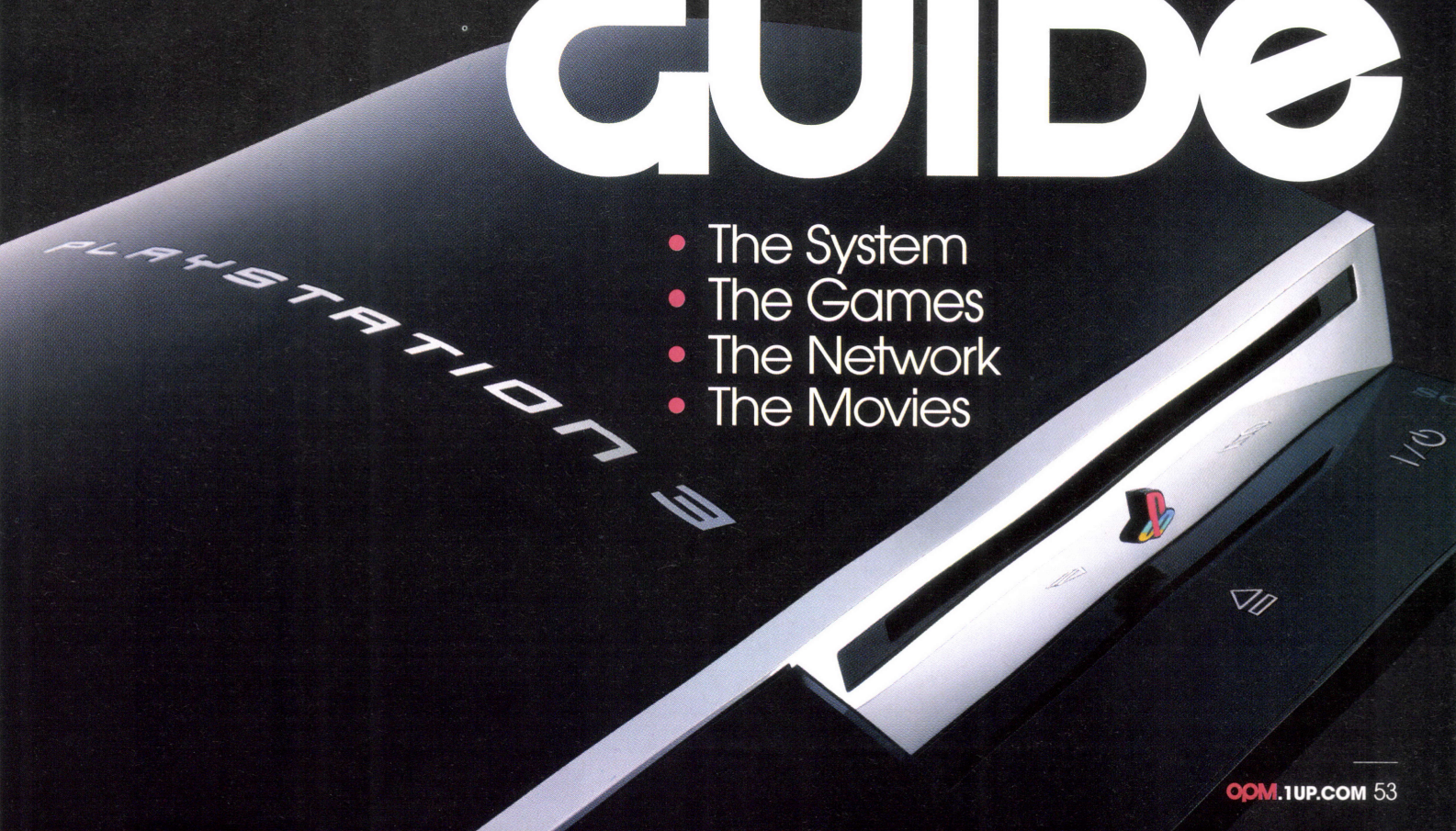
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From the editors of
Official U.S. Playstation Magazine

PS3 LAUNCH GUIDE

- The System
- The Games
- The Network
- The Movies



PLAYSTA

THE NEXT GENERATION STARTS NOW

Magnificently messy. That's one way to describe being in the delivery room to witness the birth of a baby. There are horrific moments that make you feel like you've stepped into a John Carpenter film—but by the end, when you see the newborn teeming with life, it is one of most deeply profound moments one can experience in this world.

And so it has gone with the PS3. Since Sony first officially announced its new machine at E3 in 2005, the gestation period has been a little messy. The high price, the decision not to include force feedback, release-date changes, reports of manufacturing problems, early looks of next-gen games that elicited only shrugs, and just a general lack of information have contributed to a rough labor.

All that is (mostly) about to change. The PS3 is here folks, really and truly—and what a baby! Weighing in at a healthy 10 pounds, we predict a long, healthy life. Just a quick glance at what we've assembled here in this special PS3 launch guide bears witness to the birth of something big.

At this year's E3, Sony Computer Entertainment America president and CEO Kaz Hirai proclaimed, "The next generation doesn't start until we say it does." Consider November 17 the official starting line.

—Tom Byron, Editor-in-Chief





HARDWARE

56\\→ The ins and outs of the PlayStation 3 hardware, including what kind of memory cards you can use and how the controller interacts with the system.

ONLINE

64\\→ Looking to go online right away? It's really easy with the PS3– and don't forget to check out the PlayStation Store.

LAUNCH

79\\→ Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII
70\\→ Call of Duty 3
One reason why the PS3 is good for shooters.
72\\→ The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion
The best RPG on the 360 hits the PS3.
82\\→ F.E.A.R.
Another good example of fine shooter fun.
74\\→ Fight Night Round 3
Best EA game for the PS3?
78\\→ Full Auto 2: Battlelines
72\\→ Genji: Days of the Blade
Bigger and longer and crabbier!
74\\→ Madden NFL 07
70\\→ Marvel: Ultimate Alliance
79\\→ Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire
Console launches always need robots, but does the PS3 need this one?
78\\→ NBA 07
79\\→ NBA 2K7
Why you should probably dribble in this court.
74\\→ NBA Live 07
74\\→ Need for Speed Carbon
79\\→ NHL 2K7
82\\→ Rainbow Six Vegas
68\\→ Resistance: Fall of Man
The lead PS3 launch title.
78\\→ Ridge Racer 7
Kaz Hirai loves it.
72\\→ Sonic the Hedgehog
74\\→ Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07
70\\→ Tony Hawk's Project 8
A damn good game, despite no online.
72\\→ Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom

RELEASE 07

97\\→ Armored Core 4
97\\→ Battlefield: Bad Company
98\\→ Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War
98\\→ The Darkness
96\\→ Def Jam: Icon
Def Jam goes next gen by mixing samples of both music and fighting into a seamless whole.
94\\→ Devil May Cry 4
You may not be Dante, but you sure feel like Dante.
98\\→ The Eye of Judgment
98\\→ Fatal Inertia
99\\→ Final Fantasy XIII
99\\→ Formula 1 Championship Edition
99\\→ Gran Turismo HD
100\\→ Half-Life 2
100\\→ Harker
100\\→ Heavenly Sword
100\\→ Hellboy
92\\→ Lair
No Sean Connery, but plenty of Sixaxis.
84\\→ Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
We see how playing as Old Snake feels all fresh and new.
86\\→ MotorStorm
Take a gander at what is potentially the best racing game for the PS3.
102\\→ Ni-Oh
88\\→ Ninja Gaiden Sigma
A ninja scroll full of awesome improvements to the best action game of this generation.
97\\→ SKATE
102\\→ Star Wars NextGen
102\\→ Stranglehold
93\\→ Virtua Fighter 5
We love Mexican wrestlers and their complex fighting moves.
102\\→ Virtua Tennis 3
93\\→ Warhawk
Party like it's 1995!

MOVIES

104\\→ If you want to take advantage of the PlayStation 3's movie-playing capabilities, you'll need to pick up some movies that will be available at launch.

GAMES COVERED INSIDE

97\\→ Armored Core 4
97\\→ Battlefield: Bad Company
98\\→ Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War
79\\→ Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII
70\\→ Call of Duty 3
98\\→ The Darkness
96\\→ Def Jam: Icon
94\\→ Devil May Cry 4
72\\→ The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion
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72\\→ Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom
93\\→ Virtua Fighter 5
102\\→ Virtua Tennis 3
93\\→ Warhawk

FRONT AND CENTER

The PlayStation 3 makes its debut to the world

The PlayStation 3 offers tons of functionality similar to that of a PC, but it's all incredibly easy to use and you should have no trouble jumping right in.



Finally. The PlayStation 3 is just about ready to take a spot in your home theater setup. Pictured on this page is the 60-gig version of the PS3, which features Wi-Fi, a bigger hard drive than the 20-gig PlayStation 3, and chrome trim, as well as additional memory card slots found underneath the flap. But 20-gig owners will still have access to USB memory devices.

MEMORY OPTIONS

Underneath the flap on the front of the 60-gig version of the system you'll find three memory slots for three different kinds of memory cards: Compact Flash, Secure Digital, and Memory Stick. All three formats can be used to transport video, music, and pictures to your PS3. Just plug them in while you're in the user interface and, depending on which section of the user interface that you're in, you'll immediately see what's on them. It's worth pointing out that USB memory devices such as flash drives can also be used for memory storage for both the media listed above and game save data.

WHAT ABOUT PS2 MEMORY CARDS?

Sony already revealed the PS2 memory card for the PS3. This USB device will let you use your PlayStation 2 saves on the PS3 while you're playing PS2 games. It doesn't come in the box, so you have to shell out $14.99 to get a hold of one on November 17.

If you want to pick up an additional controller at launch, it'll cost you $49.99.



THE CONTROLLER

Of course, after you get your PS3 rigged up to your TV, you're probably going to want to plug in a controller. You may be asking, "Why would I plug in a wireless controller?" As of press time, we were told that you have to plug in the controller using the USB minicables (included in the box) at least once to register it with the system. You can also use this cable to charge your controller simply by plugging it in to one of the USB ports on the front of the system—a single charge will last for a generous 30 hours.

You'll notice that the controller itself is similar in design to the DualShock 2, but there are a few differences. The Sixaxis PS3 controller does not have a vibration feature, but it does have motion sensor control as well as refined R2 and L2 buttons that now feel much more like triggers as opposed to flat buttons, giving even greater analog control.

THE 'HOME' BUTTON

Any time you want to register one or more controllers with the PS3, all you have to do is press the button with the PlayStation logo in the center of the controller. One of the red lights on top of the controller should light up to indicate that the controller has been successfully detected. It will also tell you which number it's been registered as—whether it's the first controller or the fourth. Additionally, the home button lets you power off the system, exit a game, or turn off a controller by simply holding it down. Then, you'll go to a menu where you can select either option.

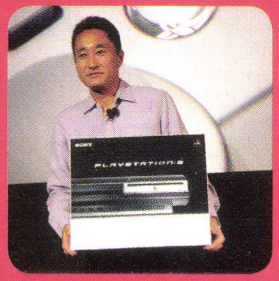
OTHER PERIPHERALS

Since the PS2 and the PS3 both use USB ports, you're probably wondering if any of your PS2 USB devices will work on the PlayStation 3. The answer is yes. The EyeToy is completely compatible with the PS3 and will even be used for video chatting. USB devices, such as a keyboard and a mouse, can also be used as long as they're both standard—a mouse or keyboard with fancy features that you wouldn't typically find on such devices probably won't work properly. The same applies to headsets and microphones.

HOOKING IT UP

Get your PlayStation 3 up and running

It looks simple, but many of the PS3's best features are powered by the ports you see here. The back of both models of the PlayStation 3 is identical since Sony decided to include HDMI functionality on the back of both units.



THE BOX

Here's what you'll find in your PlayStation 3 box when you pick it up on November 17: the system, one Sixaxis controller, an AC (power) cord, USB mini-cable, an Ethernet cable, and multi-AV composite cables. The first 500,000 units sold will also include a Blu-Ray copy of *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*.

THE VIDEO

Connecting your PlayStation 3 to a television is just as easy as connecting your PS2 was to it. If you have a standard-definition TV, then you can use the standard composite cables (included), as well as S-Video and component. However, high-definition TV owners can also use the component cables as well as an HDMI cable to view PlayStation 3 content at HD resolutions—720p, 1080i, and 1080p. The HDMI cable uses its own separate port since the signal is completely digital, unlike that carried by the other cables. You'll also have to venture into the display settings portion of the PS3 menu to tell it that you're using an HDMI cable, standard cables, or one of the other variants.

THE AUDIO

If you're an audiophile, chances are you have a nice 5.1 system or better to hook your PS3 up to, so, thankfully, all you need to do is plug an optical cable from your receiver to the back of the PlayStation 3. Next, you can go into the audio device settings option and tell the PS3 3 that you're using the optical out on the back of the system and you're done. It's important to point out that, with HDMI, the audio signal is sent through the cable along with the video signal, so if you're wondering if you still have to plug in the standard audio cables if you don't have a 5.1 setup—well, you don't. But you can still use the optical out in conjunction with HDMI.

NETWORKING

It's pretty simple—just plug an Ethernet cable into the back of the PlayStation 3 and you're pretty much good to go, assuming the other end of the cable is plugged in to a router. Those who purchase the 60GB model of the PS3 won't even have to worry about that if there's a Wi-Fi network in the area since that model comes with Wi-Fi capabilities built in. The network settings area in the user interface should display whatever networks are available. Owners of the 20GB model will have to buy a separate wireless device (a wireless router) for the same functionality.



NOISE REDUCTION

If you're wondering if the PlayStation 3 will make a lot of noise when you turn it on—wonder no more. The PS3 is really quiet, only creating 22 decibels of sound while the unit is powered on. Sure, it doesn't sound like a big deal at first, but if you've ever been in the vicinity of an Xbox 360, you know it can be rather loud.

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Belly up to the bar

Diving into the Cross Media Bar



The Cross Media Bar (XMB) interface the PlayStation 3 uses should be familiar to PSP owners as well as owners of other modern Sony electronics. There are plenty of things you can do with it, but here are just a few of our favorite features within the Cross Media Bar.

Users

This is where you can set up multiple profiles for your PlayStation 3. Essentially, any changes made to the PS3 or any games saved under a certain profile will only appear when that profile is logged in to the system. Other information, such as your PlayStation Network logon and the data associated with that, such as downloads from the store, will be tied to your profile as well.

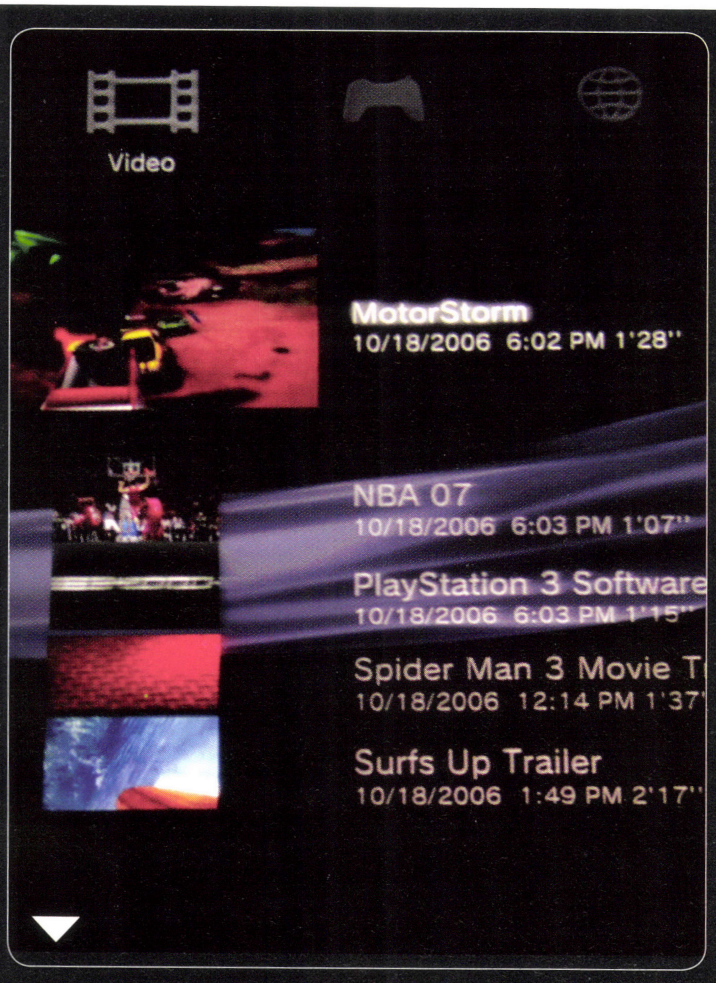
Settings

One of the things you'll probably want to do before anything else is jump into the settings area of the Cross Media Bar and see what kind of stuff you can mess around with before playing any games. Naturally, this is where you can change audio and video settings as well as select options for some of the other features of the PS3 Cross Media Bar. And, of course, you can also change some settings for the Blu-ray player and set up security options in case you want to prevent anyone from using your PS3.

Photo

A photo mode may not seem like such a big deal, but there are some cool things you can do with it on the PlayStation 3. First, you can load any pictures from a storage device, whether it's Compact Flash or a Memory Stick. You can either sort through them manually or put them into a standard slide show. The PS3 will zoom in on the pictures and slowly dissolve to the next photo. In addition, you can also use the music option to play any tunes during the slide show, but the coolest feature in this mode is the photo album.

The PS3 will look at all of the photos you have and then render them as actual photos that get dropped onto a virtual table with the date that they were taken shown next to them—a fun way to display photos.



PLAYSTATION STORE

A major part of the PlayStation 3 experience, the PlayStation Store is where you can download new demos, original PlayStation and PlayStation 2 games, movies, music, and more. For a more in-depth look at what you can do online, look no further than page 64.



VIDEO

Much like the photo area, the video mode lets you view any videos that you have stored on the PlayStation 3 or any of your memory devices. There's really not a whole lot to it, but videos do play while you're just looking through the list of videos that you have. Plus, the sound will actually play on the video that you currently have highlighted. It's a neat little feature, to be sure, and it makes searching through your videos a little easier. The PS3 plays all major MPEG formats, up to and including MPEG 4.

MUSIC

The best feature about the PlayStation 3's music-playing capabilities is that you can import audio CDs directly onto the PS3 hard drive. Interestingly, it also lets you encode these songs in three different formats: AAC, MP3, and ATRAC. You can even determine the bit rate if you don't want these files taking up a huge amount of space on your hard drive—you will sacrifice audio quality, though. And, if you're wondering if you can create playlists, you can't at the moment, but you can sort the music by artist or by the name of the album.

VISUALIZATION

What would any audio function in a console be without some kind of visualization to accompany the music? Thankfully, the PS3 offers a few different cool looking visualizers that move and jump around depending on the type of music you're playing.

WEB BROWSER

Browsing the Web is pretty simple with the PlayStation 3 controller, but if you feel the need to immerse yourself more in the experience of browsing various sites, then you can plug in a keyboard and a mouse. If you see anything interesting in your travels across the Interweb, you can save it as a bookmark or save individual files (movies and images) on the PS3.

PSP REMOTE

Now you have even more of a reason to hold onto that PSP. Sony's handheld can wirelessly connect to the PlayStation 3, allowing you to navigate through the menu to access movies, music, and pictures that are streamed directly onto the PSP. Pretty soon, you'll be able to access your PS3 from any Wi-Fi hotspot around the world just by turning on your PSP.

FRIENDS

Your PS3 friend's list displays any friends you've added on the PlayStation Network. You can view a list of who is online, users that you've blocked, and a list of people that you've met while playing a game.

CHAT SETTINGS

You can mess around with the EyeToy by testing the video quality and the microphone. You can also use the camera to take a picture to use as an avatar for your user profile, and you can send videos to other PlayStation 3 owners, too.

GAME

This is pretty self-explanatory, but this is where you'll see what game—PS1, PS2, or PS3—you've inserted into the PlayStation 3 as well as any game save data, which you can manage from this menu as well. Also, just like the PSP, the PS3 will display a "poster" of the game before it starts up.

PLAYSTATION STORE

The PlayStation experience redefined

It's time to go online! The PlayStation Store is undoubtedly one of the biggest new features in the PlayStation online universe, and regular online gaming will be much easier than it was on the PlayStation 2 thanks to some unifying features, such as a single user ID, that Sony has built into the system.

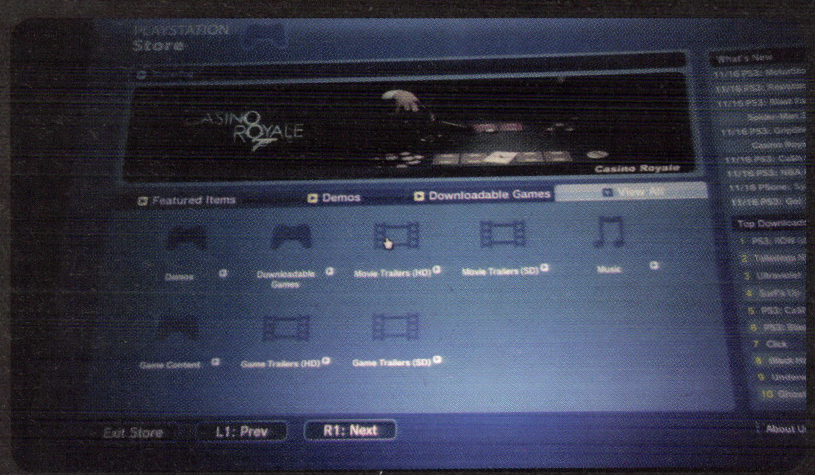


Sony Online Entertainment CEO John Smedley demonstrates the features of the PlayStation Store at a recent press event.

PAYING UP

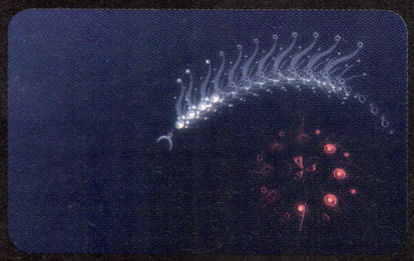
Some of the content, such as trailers and demos, in the PlayStation Store is free, but other content requires payment if you want to download it. When you want to purchase something in the store, you simply click on it to see how much it costs and then proceed to the checkout. If you've ever shopped online before, the experience is nearly identical.

But how do you get money into your PlayStation Store account? There are two options. You can simply transfer money into your Wallet—a feature in the PlayStation Store—by using either a preexisting credit card number or a PlayStation Card (with a fixed amount of money) that will be available at various retail outlets. After adding money you can go ahead and purchase the content, check out, and then download it.





Blast Factor (right) and *flOw* (below) are just two of the games that you'll be able to download from the store on November 17.



KIND OF LIKE iTUNES

It's worth noting that when you purchase something in the store, you can redownload it at any time. In fact, you can even download it on up to five different PlayStation 3s. So if you want to show a friend a new game that you recently bought, go right ahead and download it on his or her PS3.

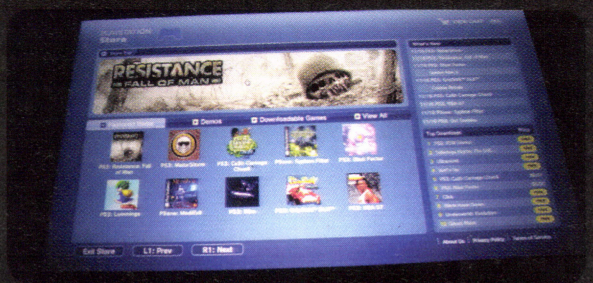
THE DOORS ARE OPEN

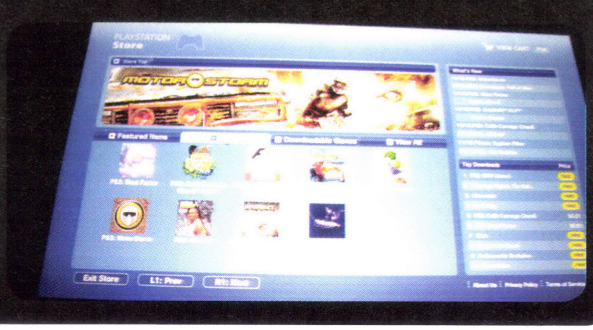
There will be a surprising amount of content available for download from the PlayStation Store around launch. Here are some games and demos you can look forward to. We don't know the final pricing for some of the full games, but we do know that all of them will cost around $14.99 and less.

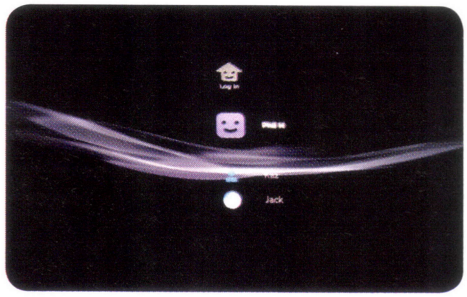
MotorStorm (PlayStation 3 demo)
Blast Factor
Crash Carnage Chaos
Criminal Crackdown
flOw
Go! Sudoku
Go! Swizzleblock 2
GripShift
Lemmings 2
Wheel of Fortune

NAVIGATING THROUGH THE AISLES

It's pretty easy to get through the store to find what you want. You'll immediately be greeted with the top download of the day, but there are several other areas to explore. To the right of the screen you'll see some of the most downloaded items as well as a list of the newest items added to the store with the corresponding cost next to them. You'll also see that there are several categories at the bottom of the screen. Here you can go directly to the content you're looking for, whether it's movies, game demos, or music.







CREATING AN ACCOUNT

Going online with the PlayStation 3 isn't nearly as complicated as going online with the PlayStation 2. In fact, Sony has addressed many of the issues PS2 owners had with the online service, starting with the single login. There are now two different types of accounts that you can create—a main account and secondary accounts that you will see when you connect to the network via the PlayStation 3's web browser. A master account can essentially access all facets of the PlayStation Network, including the PlayStation Store, but with an associated account, you can implement controls and various usage restrictions. This will come in handy when you don't want someone—basically your children—abusing your account by continually purchasing games or other forms of content.

FRIENDS

Much like Xbox Live, the PlayStation 3 Network gives you the ability to add or block other network users on a friends list. This list lets you view who's online at any given time, and, naturally, it lets you message them as well by using either the software keyboard or a USB keyboard. You can also find a list of people you've played online games with if you wish to add them after finishing a game. Unfortunately, the current version of the interface doesn't let you check messages while you're playing in a game, so you'll have to jump out and view them within the PlayStation 3's user interface, but you still receive new message notifications. Future software updates, which will be relatively frequent, could easily fix this issue.

PLAYING ONLINE

Perhaps the most important feature of the PS3's online capabilities is gaming. The good thing is that it's free. The bad thing is that developers can use a wide variety of tools to get their games online, so you might see one game using GameSpy while another uses Xfire—both of which can tie into Sony's servers for the purpose of stat tracking. So there doesn't seem to be a central area for everything related to online gaming quite yet.

RIVALRY AT ITS FASTEST

Sonic and his top rivals go head-to-head and only one will emerge victorious! With mega Boosts and a bag full of tricks, they launch Fireballs, zap each other with Confusion, or vault over each other as they bolt for the finish line. Compete in multiplayer mode against your own rival to prove who is best!



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PlayStation Portable

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Hype ps3 LAUNCH GUIDE

LAUNCH GAMES

Okay, we know that the PS3 is a hefty chunk of change. We also know how disappointing it is to spend that money on some games and then go "that's it?" when playing them. So we've compiled this list of launch games, give you the basic facts (Sixaxis, resolution), and whether it's a must-buy when you pick up your PS3, or if you can wait until you get more moneys.



If you think this mechanized walking thingy looks a bit familiar, well, go back to *Ratchet: Deadlocked* and its landstalker.

Page 110
COVER STORY! Go check our very own Joe Rybicki's take in our first PS3 review!

pub. Sony CEA dev. Insomniac

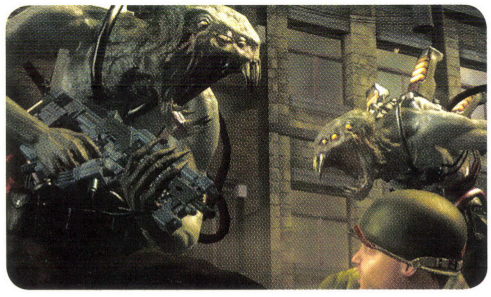
resistance: FALL OF MAN

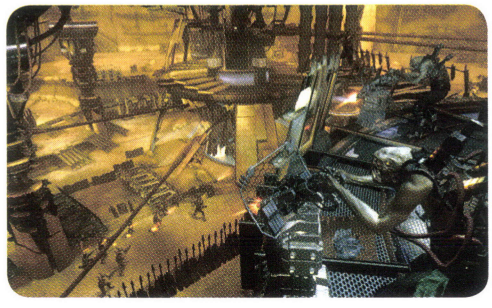
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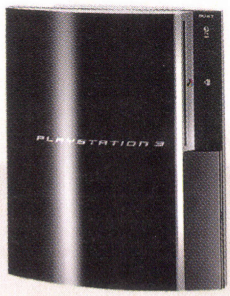
With only 400,000 units available on launch day, and likely not more than a half million units total on shelves by the first of next year, November 17 has always been less about the PS3 and more about *Resistance: Fall of Man* for Sony in the States. After all, Sony CEA wants to sell the epic sci-fi first-person shooter to every single person who is lucky enough to buy the system, and there are plenty of good reasons to support this goal: crystal-sharp graphics, intense story-driven gameplay, 40 players online—all this and more from one of the most reliable and respected developers in the games biz, let alone for the PlayStation. *Resistance* is also the first PS3 game to use the Sixaxis motion sensor for more than just turning. And we can also promise you that the first first-party game out the chute is a polished, solid work—for all the details, check out our exclusive review of *Resistance* on page 110.

Resolution: 720p **Online:** Yes
Sixaxis: Yes **Must-buy:** Yes

Resistance is also the first PS3 game to use the Six-axis motion sensor.









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Resolution: 720p Online: No
Sixaxis: Yes Must-buy: Yes

Tony Hawk's Project 8

BACK TO BASICS

| pub. Activision dev. Neversoft

Neversoft is bringing the *Tony Hawk* series back to basics by focusing on pure trick-based gameplay. In impressively massive—and visually powerful—environments, *Tony Hawk's Project 8* lets you grind and combo just about anywhere you want. The player-characters are entirely motion-captured, resulting in a smoothly realistic look and control. We're particularly impressed with the new Nail the Trick feature that uses the analog sticks interestingly: In a jump, you can switch into a slow-mo mode where you'll see a close-up of your feet. Move the analog sticks back and forth to pull off all sorts of spin tricks with your board. But we're still bummed about *P8*'s limited multiplayer.

Call of Duty 3

HEED THIS CALL

| pub. Activision dev. Treyarch

If you're going to buy one first-person shooter at launch, make sure it's *Resistance*—but if you're going to buy another, *Call of Duty 3* is a fine choice. The World War II series' stunning next-gen installment sets you smack-dab in the weeks following the D-Day assault as the Allies make their epic push through France. The graphics are painstakingly crisp and detailed, the action intense, and all vehicles—tanks, jeeps, motorcycles—are playable. Treyarch (of Spider-Man fame) took the reins from series creator Infinity Ward, and the results are downright impressive. Multiplayer allows up to 24 players, and the Sixaxis motion sensor is even used, primarily for melee attacks.



Resolution: 720p Online: Yes
Sixaxis: Yes Must-buy: No



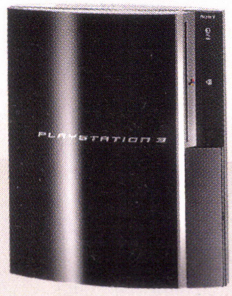
Resolution: 1080p Online: Yes
Sixaxis: Yes Must-buy: No

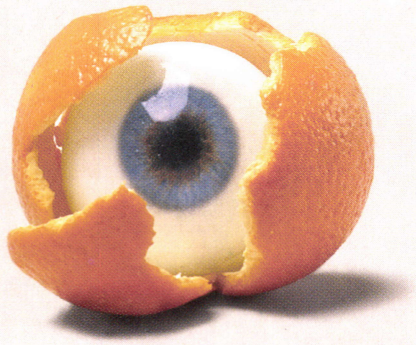
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance

"MORE OF THE SAME" IS A GOOD THING

| pub. Activision dev. Raven Software

As any *OPM* reader knows, we pretty much love the *X-Men Legends* action-RPG series that Raven has so expertly created for the PS2 and PSP. The good news is that *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* is very much the same game—only bigger, prettier (dropping the cel shading in favor of 3D) and, we're guessing, better. With characters drawn from the entire Marvel universe (140!), you'll pick your four-hero team and level it up through dozens of single-layer levels and missions. You'll also take on three of your closest friends in multiplayer modes (including co-op). We suspect *UA* will have a wide appeal, but only the most die-hard *Legends* fans will want this one on launch day.





It dreams in Blu-ray.

With 10 times the storage capacity of standard DVDs and true 1080p image potential, you'll see levels that are truly massive, environments that are more complex and movies that are absolutely dripping with vibrant detail. Kind of makes you wonder what its nightmares look like.

Video output in HD requires cables and an HD-compatible display, both sold separately. Copy-protected Blu-ray video discs can only output at 1080p using an HDMI cable connected to a device that is compatible with the HDCP standard. HDMI cable not included. Additional equipment may be required to use the HDMI connector. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Play B3yond is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. All names, brands and associated imagery featured are trademarks and/or copyrighted materials of their respective owners.

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

THE 360'S BIGGEST GAME COMES TO THE PS3

| pub. Bethesda dev. Bethesda

Imagine a place where the line between good and evil can be crossed every single day—that is *Oblivion*. This sprawling free-form RPG, previously on the Xbox 360, is arguably one of the best games of 2006—and the fact that the PS3 version has a new guild and accompanying quest line will make it worthwhile even for 360 players.



Resolution: 720p Online: Tentative
Sixaxis: No Must-buy: Yes



Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom

SHARPEN THE BATTLE-AX

| pub. Sony Online dev. Sony Online

Dark Kingdom offers a different experience from most other launch games. While the role-playing aspect might be less than hardcore players will like, the action elements offer good variety. Tweaks have been made to the *Champions of Norrath* formula, but fans of those titles will recognize that the core game remains the same. Thankfully, the graphics have evolved tremendously since it was first shown.

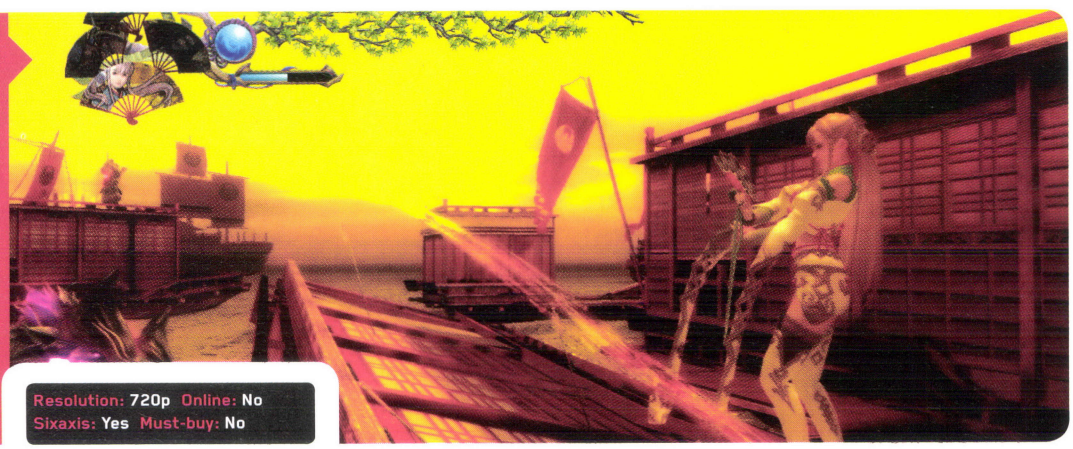
Resolution: 720p Online: Yes
Sixaxis: No Must-buy: No

Genji: Days of the Blade

DOUBLE DOWN

| pub. Sony CEA dev. Game Republic/Sony CEI

Out of the box, *Genji: DOTB* is sure to win highest praise for its gorgeous graphics and smooth character design and control. An all-out, action-packed hack-n-slasher, *Genji* lets you play—and switch on the fly—four characters based on the great samurai of feudal Japan. Hundreds of enemies, slick combos, and double the playtime of the first game (bringing it to at least 16 hours) make *Genji: DOTB* an accessible single-player show-off game.



Resolution: 720p Online: No
Sixaxis: Yes Must-buy: No



Sonic the Hedgehog

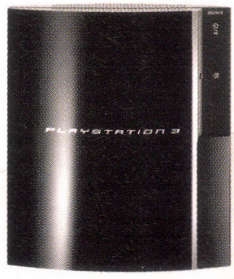
RUNNING FROM SYSTEM TO SYSTEM

| pub. Sega dev. Sonic Team

On one hand, the PS3 doesn't really have a platformer, and *Sonic* looks like a decent candidate to fill that slot. Being able to choose one of three different hedgehogs to play as seems interesting—but overall, the game feels like any of the other previous *Sonic* titles. Additionally, it doesn't really seem to be pushing any of the PS3's potential. If you're really jonesing for a platformer, then this will satisfy that itch. Otherwise, you can wait on this one.

Resolution: 720p Online: No
Sixaxis: No Must-buy: No

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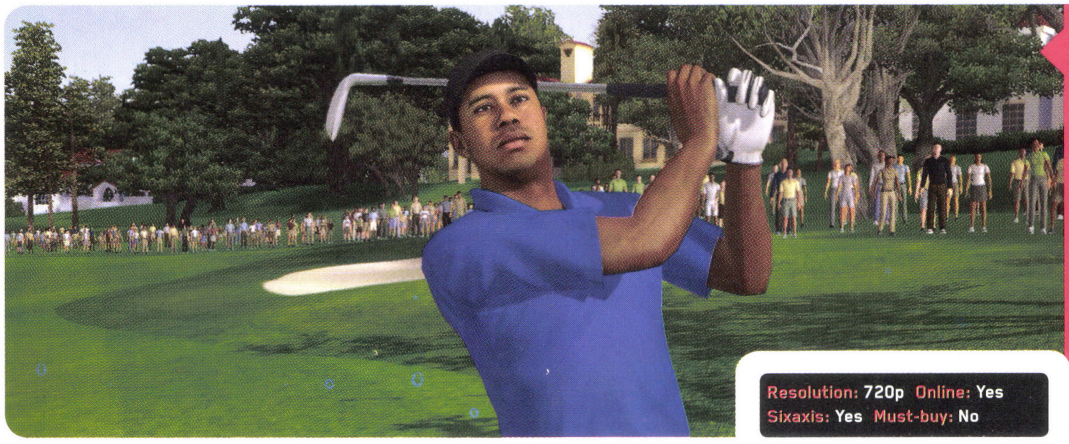




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The SIXAXIS™ wireless controller utilizes sensors that are designed to read when a player angles, tilts, thrusts or pulls. Which means it feels more like an extension of your body, allowing for a more intuitive and immersive experience. Something to ponder the next time you're in a tailspin, one second from hitting the ground.

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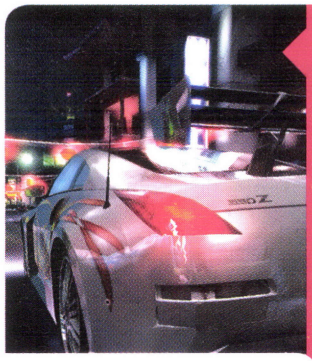
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07

TIGER, TIGER, NOT SO BRIGHT

| pub. EA Sports dev. EA Redwood Shores

Much like *Tiger's* debut on the 360 last year, the first PS3 outing is looking less than awesome. While we like the ability to use the Sixaxis to adjust the ball's spin, the visuals just aren't all that impressive. Also, the PS3 offers a shorter list of golfers and courses. When you consider the $40 price tag of the PS2 version compared to the $60 PS3 game, our recommendation is to go old school for one more year.

Resolution: 720p **Online:** Yes
Sixaxis: Yes **Must-buy:** No



Need for Speed Carbon

NOT QUITE A DIAMOND, BUT STILL SHINY

| pub. EA Games dev. EA Blackbox

If you like playing this series online, then the PS3 version of the latest *NFS* is your only option, as the PS2 version is offline only. We'd argue that this is the better version of the game to get, as the online provides some great fun—we particularly like the mode where the last-place finisher of each lap gets turned into a cop and then tries to take out the remaining racers. While there's no ground-breaking gameplay here, it's a solid option for race fans.

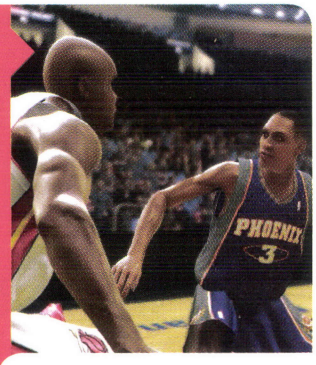
Resolution: 720p **Online:** Yes
Sixaxis: Yes **Must-buy:** No

NBA Live 07

MORE LIKE HALF-LIVE

| pub. EA Sports dev. EA Canada

At press time, the specifics about EA's basketball game were still not clarified—but if the reviews of the 360 version are any indication, we'd give this series a bye until next year. With bare-bones online options and fewer modes than current-gen games, there's less meat here than on the PS2 version. And the fact that the game hasn't been shown publicly since E3 and isn't being released till mid-December does little to inspire confidence.



Resolution: 720p **Online:** Yes
Sixaxis: TBA **Must-buy:** No

Madden NFL 07

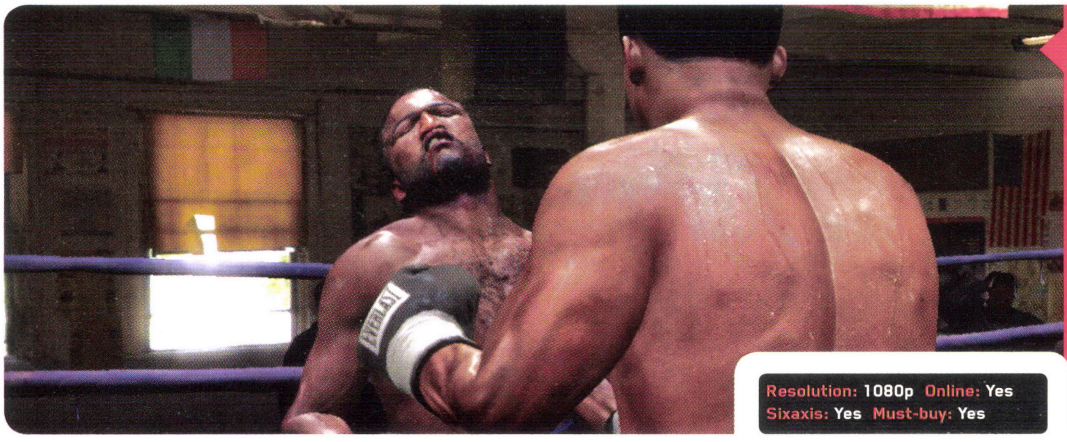
ARE YOU READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL?

| pub. EA Sports dev. EA Tiburon

This perennial warhorse might not offer any surprises, but it's a reliable quantity. While the PS3 incarnation doesn't have all the modes available in this year's PS2 version of the game, the trade-off is much prettier graphics and a cleaner online setup. You'll also get the minigame character-creation system from the 360 version, and the dev team has incorporated the Sixaxis as well—for example, you can now use the motion sensor to fake a snap.



Resolution: 720p **Online:** Yes
Sixaxis: Yes **Must-buy:** No



Fight Night Round 3

JUMP INTO THE RING

| pub. EA Sports dev. EA Chicago

Out of all of EA's launch titles, this is our top pick. For one, it looks amazing, and thanks to the new first-person mode (which is exclusive to the PS3 version of the game), you can witness the blood and sweat rolling off your opponent's body up close and personal. Another neat feature is that you can use the tilt sensor to execute illegal moves like head-butts. Those of you with high-definition TVs that you're dying to show off can't miss this.

Resolution: 1080p **Online:** Yes
Sixaxis: Yes **Must-buy:** Yes



PLAYSTATION 3

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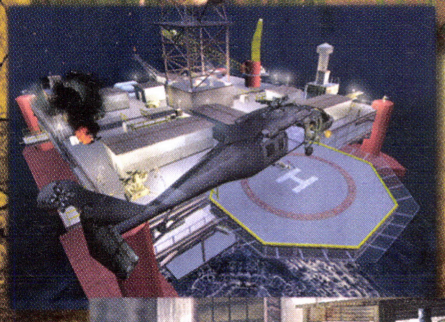
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PlayStation 2

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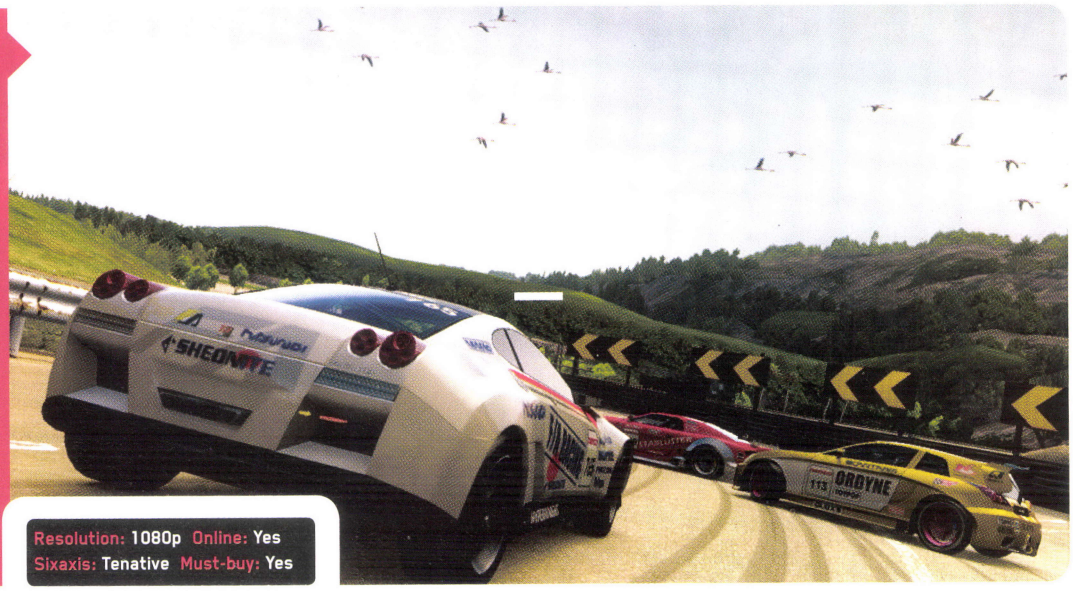

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Ridge Racer 7

C'MON NOW, IT'S RIDGE RACER!

| pub. Namco Bandai dev. Namco Bandai

Hey, what can we say? We love *Ridge Racer*. With silky-smooth graphics (hooray 60 frames per second!) and controls, plus the tried-and-true formula of arcade drift racing, *RR7* is our PS3 comfort food. We like selecting a slick-looking car and having it drift crazily through the streets and mountain roads. In addition to the traditional drift-crazy racing, new additions like plug-ins that affect car performance (of both your and your opponents' vehicles) and "slipsteaming" (or "drafting," which both describe the speed boost you get from following another car's "wake") give the game just enough gloss to feel new without being foreign. Plus online play to become the one "Ridge Racer" in the world.



Resolution: 1080p Online: Yes
Sixaxis: Tenative Must-buy: Yes



Resolution: 1080p Online: Yes
Sixaxis: Yes Must-buy: No

Full Auto 2: Battlelines

ROAD RAGE HAS A NEW MEANING

| pub. Sega dev. Pseudo Interactive

Launch lineups are typically full of guns and cars, but *Full Auto 2* bests everyone by doing guns *and* cars together! (Take that, *Resistance* and *Ridge Racer 7*!) Those who played the first *Full Auto* on the 360 should know that this game is basically the same premise (beating everyone in the race while simultaneously shooting the crap out of them) with some tweaks (such as new multiplayer modes that didn't make it to the 360 release). One of the most significant changes is that now all the destruction you're causing actually can have an impact on how races turn out—shoot down that pipe stretching across the road, and you might take out the opponent who's riding your bumper.

NBA 07

NOT JUST A PORT

| pub. Sony CEA dev. Sony CEA

Sony's basketball series has lagged behind those of EA and 2K Sports in recent years, but it already has a leg up in its first outing on the PS3—after all, it's the only basketball game that comes in glorious 1080p. It's also different from its PS2 and PSP brethren, with unique modes such as NBA Replay, which challenges gamers to re-create scenarios from real-life NBA games. Even better, during the NBA season, Sony plans to add several new challenges for download each week based on events from that week's games, so hoops fans can live out their fantasies by role-playing a virtual LeBron James or Kobe Bryant.



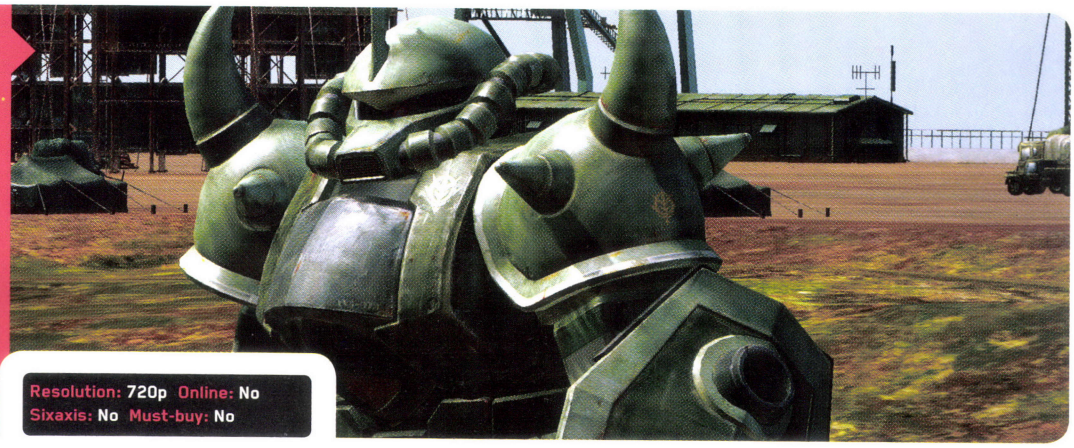
Resolution: 1080p Online: Yes
Sixaxis: Yes Must-buy: No

Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire

SUITS US OK

| pub. Namco Bandai dev. Namco Bandai

What's a next-gen launch without a good ol'-fashioned mech game? Namco Bandai's answer is simple: *Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire*. Bringing the popular anime to action-packed life, *Crossfire* lets you battle it out as a member of the Federation or the Zeon in dozens of Earth-based arenas. The machines themselves look good, but in an early look, we found controls slow and clunky.



Resolution: 720p **Online:** No
Sixaxis: No **Must-buy:** No



Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII

ANGELS GETTING THEIR WINGS

| pub. Ubisoft dev. Ubisoft Romania

If you're the kind of person who counts the rivets on the variants of the Focke-Wulf Fw 190, then, er, this isn't the game for you. If you just like flying old planes around to shoot down baddies in World War II, then this arcade-style flight sim will serve you fine. Except, well, this is a port. It goes a bit further, in that it uses the Sixaxis as its main control scheme, but that's about it.

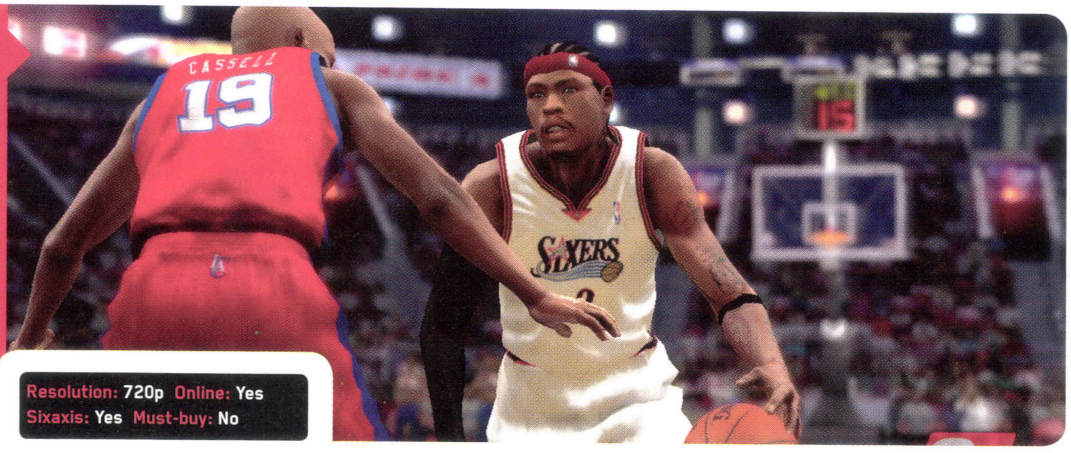
Resolution: 720p **Online:** Yes
Sixaxis: Yes **Must-buy:** No

NBA 2K7

TILT-A-THROW

| pub. 2K Sports dev. Visual Concepts

Another year, another well-constructed basketball game from Visual Concepts. Here's a rundown of PS3-specific additions: full 10-player online, use of the Sixaxis (like the free throw, where you tilt the controller back and forth to perform a free throw while opposing players can shake their controllers to shake your screen), and general improvements to the animations and facial models. Sports fans (who haven't snagged it yet) should grab this.



Resolution: 720p **Online:** Yes
Sixaxis: Yes **Must-buy:** No



Resolution: 720p **Online:** Yes
Sixaxis: TBD **Must-buy:** No

NHL 2K7

ON THE ROCKS

| pub. 2K Sports dev. Visual Concepts

NHL 2K7 may no longer hold the hockey crown on the PS2, but it will on the PS3 by default, as it's the only on-ice action for this season. As with *NBA 2K7*, you've got a nice, meaty franchise mode, and one of the big new features that 2K is pimping is something called "Cinemotion," the fancy-pants new camera system. However, on the negative side are the lackluster interface and gameplay. Unless you're jonesing for some high-sticking, wait till next year.



RIDGE RACER® 7

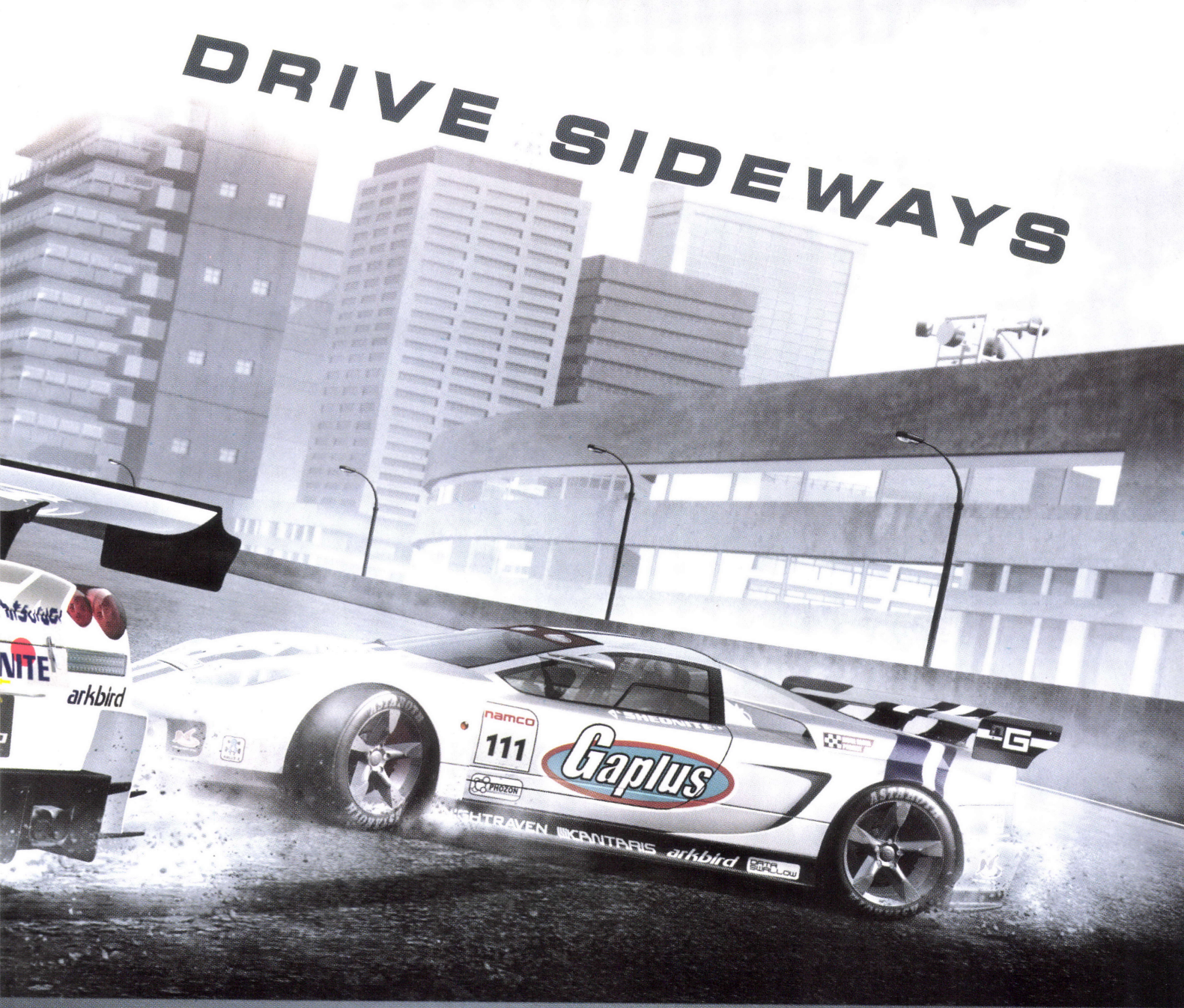
RATING PENDING
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PLAYSTATION 3

BANDAI NAMCO Games

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| pub. Vivendi Universal dev. Day 1 Studios

F.E.A.R.

ONE SCARY SHOOTER YOU SHOULDN'T RESIST

With smooth-as-silk controls, AI that actually deserves that second letter, and freaky, *Ring*-like moments that would scare John Carpenter, the addictive *F.E.A.R.* is yet another reason why the PS3 is going to be good for first-person shooter fans. With only a few situational puzzles and a lot of increasingly tough bad guys, *F.E.A.R.* is decidedly more in the run-and-gun vein, though it does let you pull off your best Neo impression with some *Matrix*-like slow-mo. And if that doesn't work, you can hit guys with your gun or kick them like someone who's seen too many Jet Li movies. In fact, the only thing that isn't exceptional about *F.E.A.R.* is the array of multiplayer modes—Capture the Flag? Again? Really?—though they are still fun, with three of the 13 maps being exclusive to the PS3.

Resolution: 1080i **Online:** Yes
Sixaxis: Undetermined **Must-buy:** No



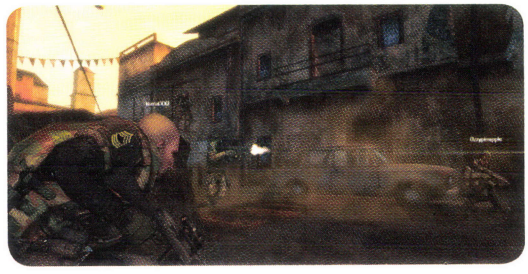
Melee is useful! A pretty cool way to take out bad dudes is to jump in the air, slow down time, and then connect your foot to their face.

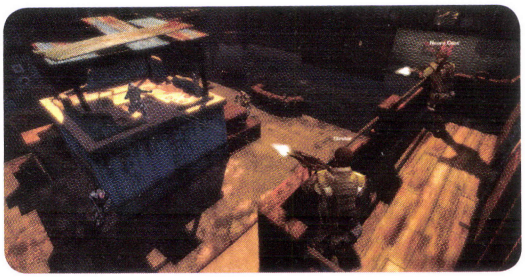
| pub. Ubisoft dev. Ubisoft Montreal

Rainbow Six Vegas

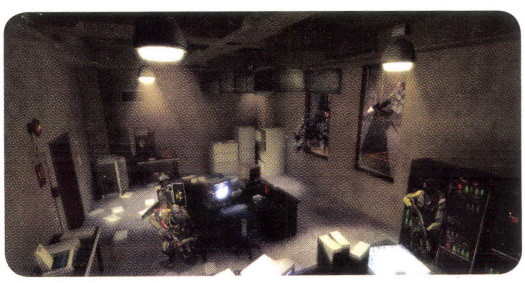
DOUBLE-TAPS INSTEAD OF DOUBLE-DOWNS













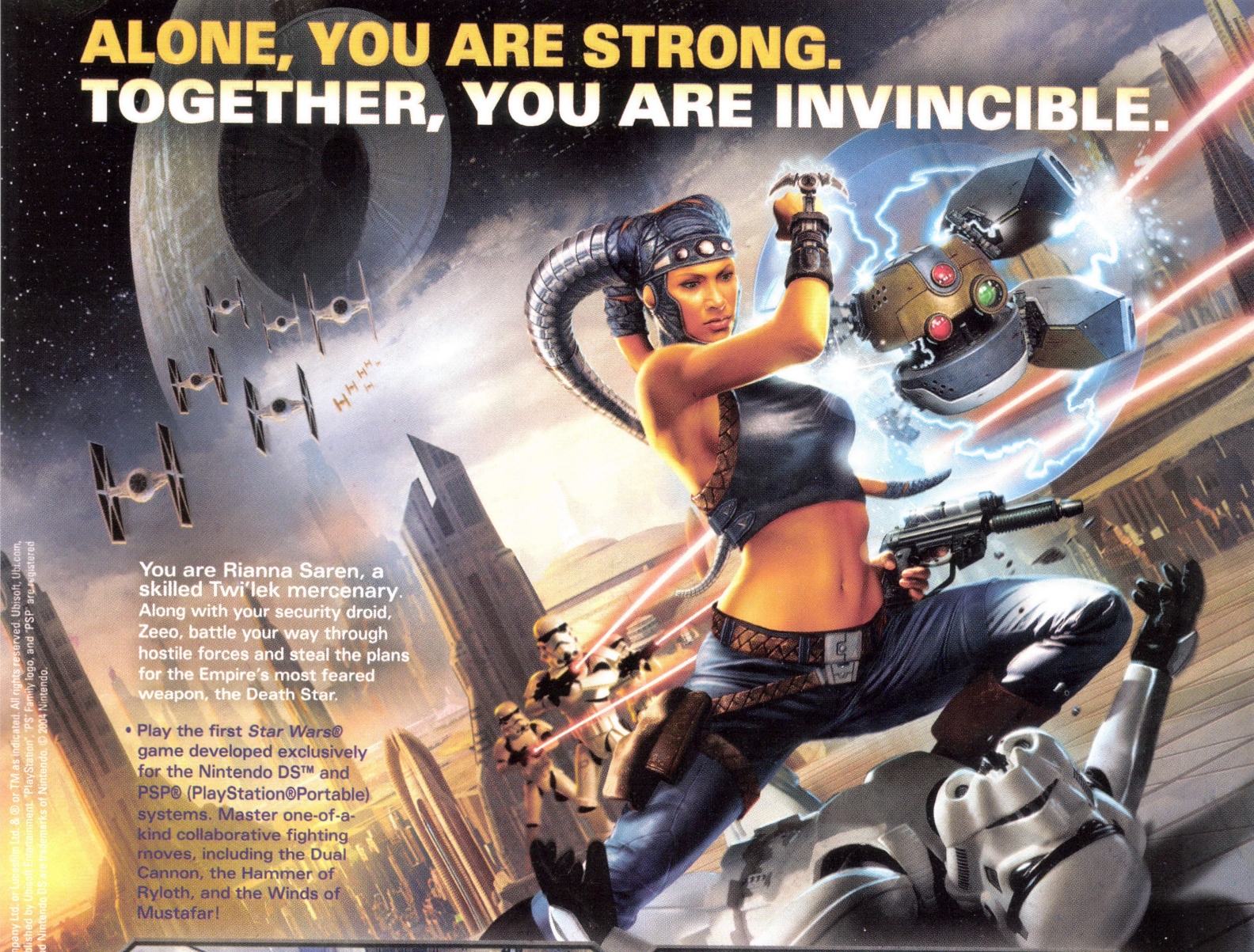
Let's pretend that *Rainbow Six Lockdown* didn't really happen and that this is the first *Rainbow* game since *Rainbow Six 3*. Seems like a worthy heir so far: fantastic graphics, interesting missions, lots of new toys to play with, and the chance to go online with your buddies to take down terrorists at the Bellagio or some such. Plus, we like that this is a first-person game that isn't painted in brown or gray, but rather in crazy-looking neon.

The main thing holding this back is its multiplatform nature. It feels like a damn good game, but with the real difference between this and the Xbox 360 version being Sixaxis support (tilt to move the "snake cam" around), you should focus on spending your limited launch money on more PS3-centric titles and pick this up if you either have loads of cash or are a tactical-shooter junkie.

Resolution: 720p **Online:** Yes
Sixaxis: Yes **Must-buy:** No

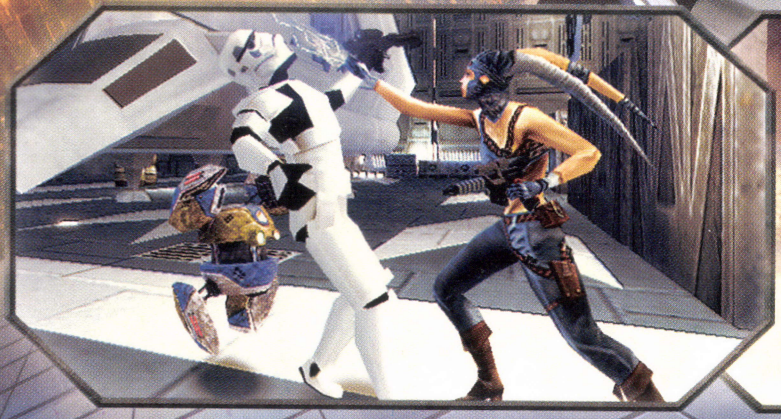


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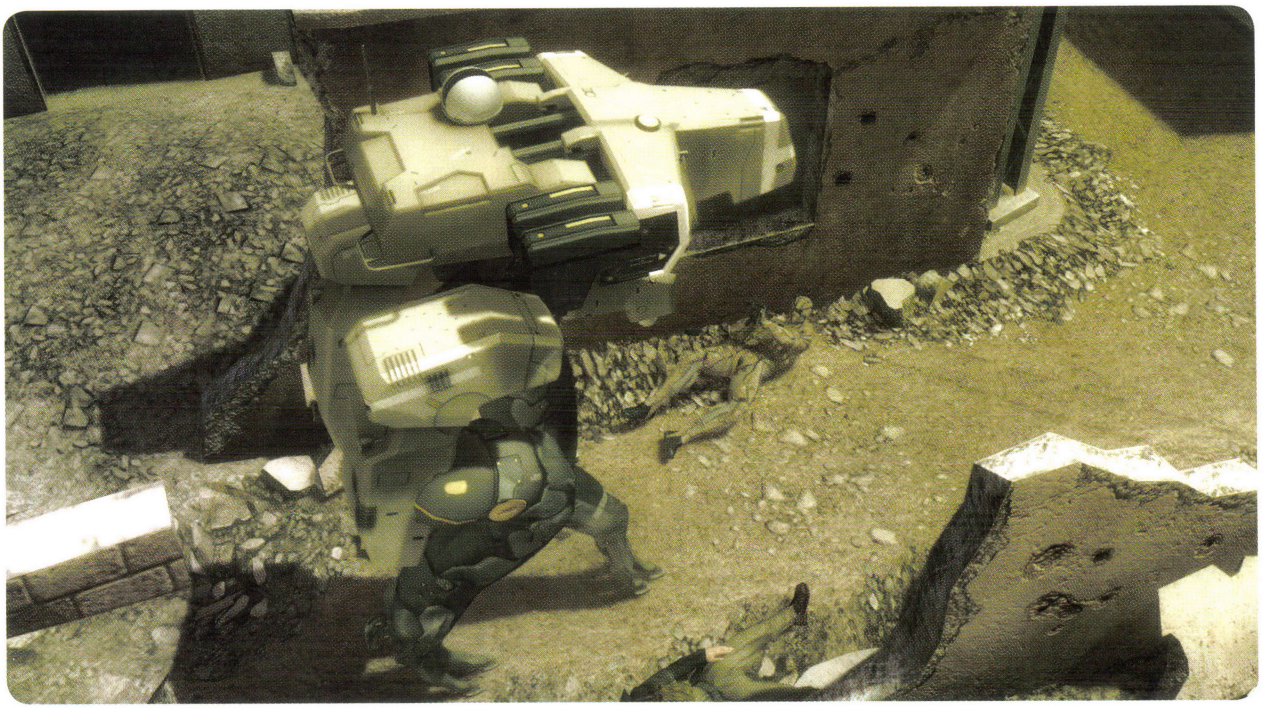
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release 07

We just told you which launch games we thought were must-buys, and which ones you can wait for. We all know that launch titles don't take full advantage of a system's potential, and that it takes at least another year before you see some amazing games. So to help you feel better about your purchase, here's a rundown of some of the most exciting games we're looking forward to that are coming out in 2007 and beyond...



pub. Konami dev. Konami Productions

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

KOJIMA SHOWS GAMEPLAY DETAILS!

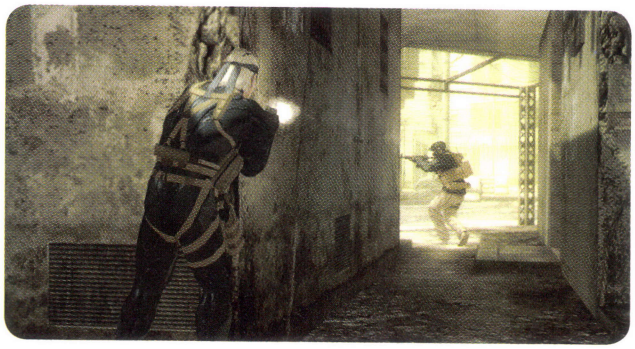


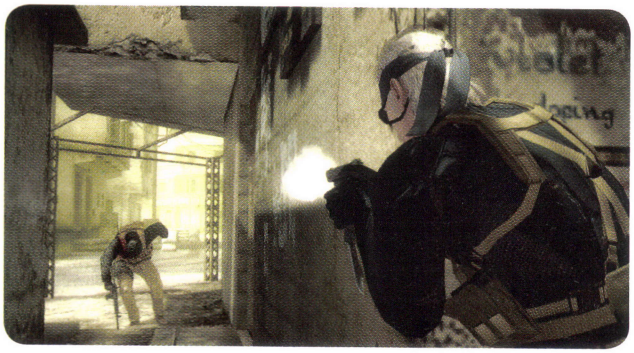










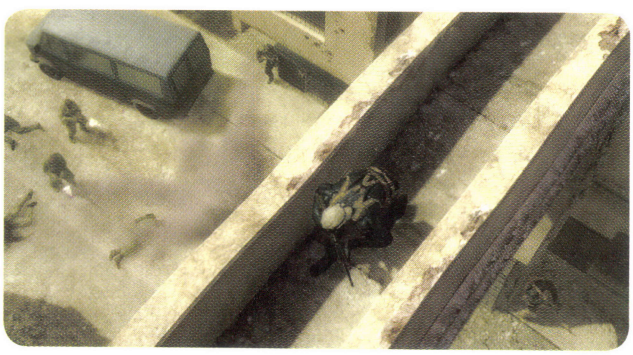


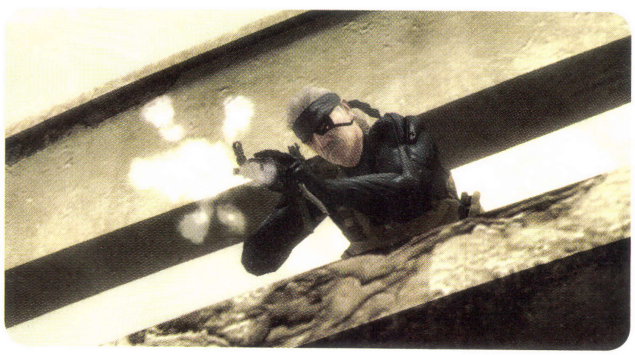


We say "gameplay details" because the newest trailer showed more than Old Snake pontificating on his miserable life or action scenes that looked staged for cut-scene coolness and not for gameplay. There were clips of Old Snake sneaking around, shooting baddies (with both a first-person view and an over-the-shoulder perspective à la *Resident Evil 4*), and using his Octo-Camo to be sneaky (since the Octo-Camo mimics whatever Old Snake touches, we assume it's not menu-based like *Metal Gear Solid 3*'s camouflage). On the other hand, the trailer didn't feature a heads-up display—and it was still a trailer, so we'll probably have to wait until the middle of next year for true gameplay details.

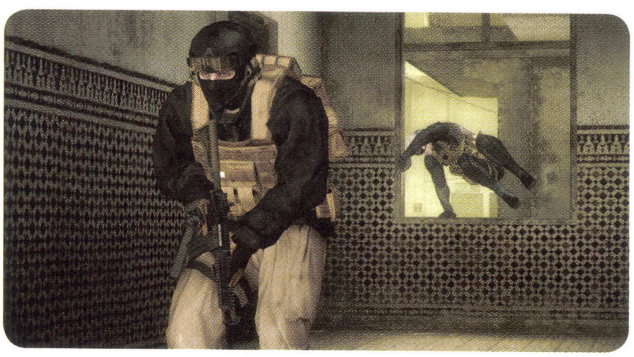
We also spotted some potential uses for the Sixaxis' tilt sensor in the trailer, such as Old Snake rolling around in a barrel (he seems to have expanded his repertoire of "things to do while hiding in a container"), Old Snake rolling on the floor to evade a Metal Gear, and Old Snake quickly leaning from side to side while aiming in first-person.

Oh, and the end of the trailer had a "WTF" moment of Old Snake, after hiding from some soldiers, taking off his mask to reveal...Young Snake! Our random pet theory (which is different than the kids on the Internets who say that Old Snake is using the Octo-Camo to make his face look young): You only play as Old Snake for act one, then he dies and you play as Young Snake for the rest of the game (echoing the "Tanker/Big Shell" and "Virtuous Mission/Snake Eater" structure of *MGS2* and *MGS3*, respectively). Young Snake is either a new clone or a clone with memories downloaded from Old Snake (hey, it worked in *Venture Bros.*!).





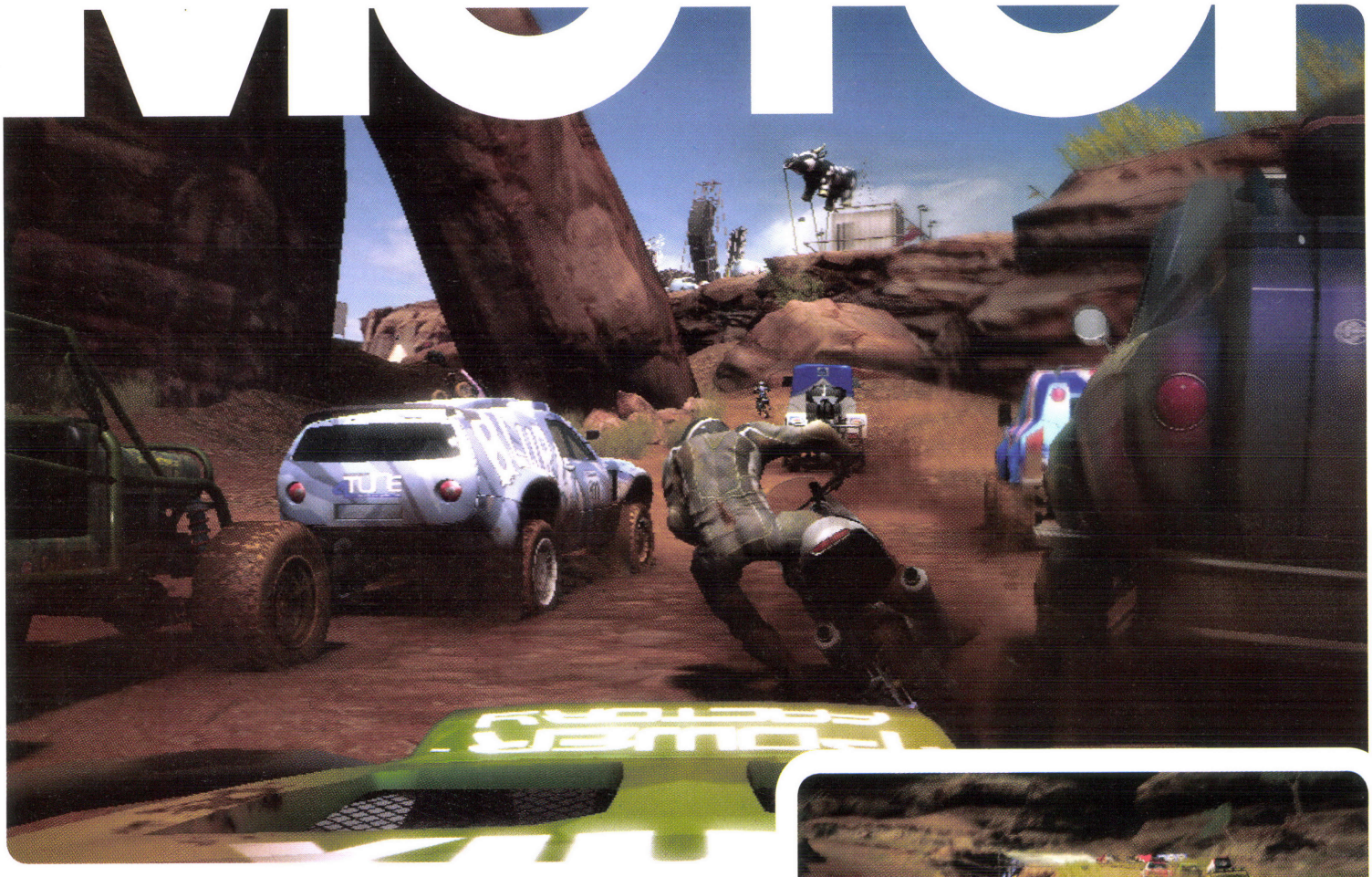




| pub. Sony CEA dev. Evolution Studios

MOTORSTORM

GETTING DIRT ON OUR PS3 AND LOVING IT







OK, we're just going to flat-out say it: If one vehicular racing title justifies the PS3's price tag, it's this one. Yes, we also love *Ridge Racer 7*, but that's a traditional arcade car-racing game. *MotorStorm*, meanwhile, focuses on crazy off-road racing, with deformable terrain, over-the-top physics, tight controls (at press time, the team was still debating the final use of the tilt sensor; it currently works for steering, but that might change), a large variety of vehicles both standard and atypical (dirt bikes and giant trailer trucks are both raceable), and gorgeous graphics.

Oh, from our playtime, we already have a tip: Play it in first-person. Tearing through the mud and tumbling around is much better viewed through first-person eyes rather than from the third-person view of someone riding a bike or an ATV or a truck. OK, it won't really help you gameplaywise, but it's a great way to show off both your shiny HDTV and the PS3's visual power.

If one racing title justifies the PS3's price tag, it's this one.

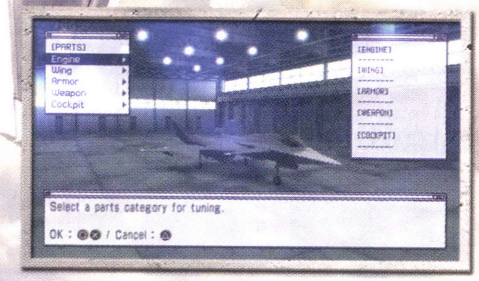
ACE COMBAT® X
Skies of Deception

TAKE CONTROL OF THE SKIES

The Ace Combat® level of excellence returns in an all-new game designed specifically to take advantage of the PSP® (PlayStation®Portable) system. Enter into an entirely new highflying action-packed story that will challenge your abilities in new ways as you take on the role of an ace pilot defending the country of Aurelia. Ace Combat® X Skies of Deception brings all the realistic aircraft and combat to a new level providing intense action to any gamer on the go.



STRATEGIC AI SYSTEM THAT CHANGES ACCORDING TO YOUR IN-GAME DECISIONS



REAL LIFE AND ORIGINAL TUNABLE AIRCRAFT TO PILOT INTO BATTLE



2-4 MULTIPLAYER WIRELESS BATTLES IN VARIOUS MODES

TEEN T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Alcohol Reference
Mild Language
Violence

PlayStation.Portable

BANDAI NAMCO Games

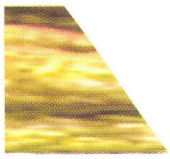
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pub. Tecmo dev. Team Ninja

NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA

BLACKER THAN BLACK







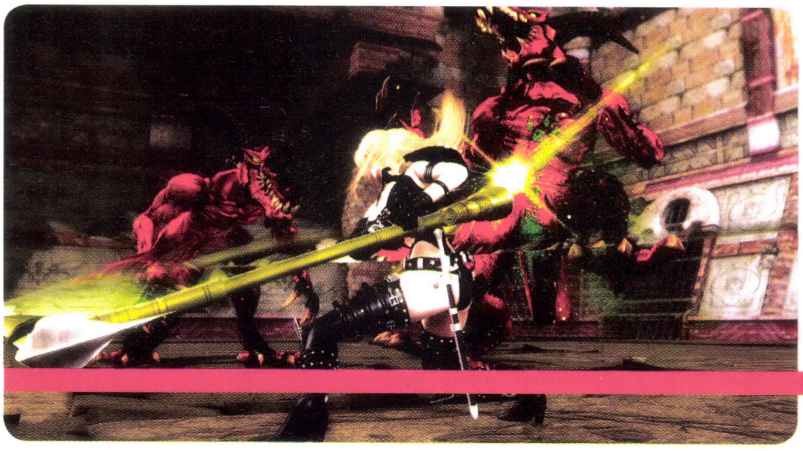
Yes, the greatest action game to grace the Xbox (and, arguably, the current generation of consoles) is now making an appearance on the PS3. Then again, *Ninja Gaiden* was supposed to be a PS2 launch title, so we're treating this as a belated makeup on that original promise.

Except it won't just be a *Ninja Gaiden* port. *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* is considered a remake, or an "extension," of the original game. From the trailer and a short interview with director Yousuke Hayashi, the basic rundown of new additions to *NGS* are: superspiffy graphics (in fact, there are no more FMVs—everything in the game is rendered in real time), new areas and levels (including locales cut from the original game), a bevy of new weapons (we're all about dual-wielding katanas), and playable Rachel (protagonist Ryu's fiend-hunter acquaintance).

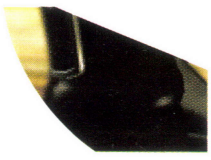
The greatest current-gen action game is appearing on the PS3.

After seeing glimpses of Rachel swinging her crazy hammer around, we asked Hayashi for more details on how Rachel's gameplay is integrated into the story. Essentially, every time Ryu meets up with Rachel in a cut-scene, the story will jump back a bit, and then you'll then play as Rachel to experience her perspective (Rachel's view will help fill in the gaps in *Ninja Gaiden*'s plot). We asked Hayashi about what it's like to play Rachel, and he coyly mentioned, "Well, Ryu is a master ninja, so that's his gameplay. Rachel's gameplay will be that of a master fiend hunter."

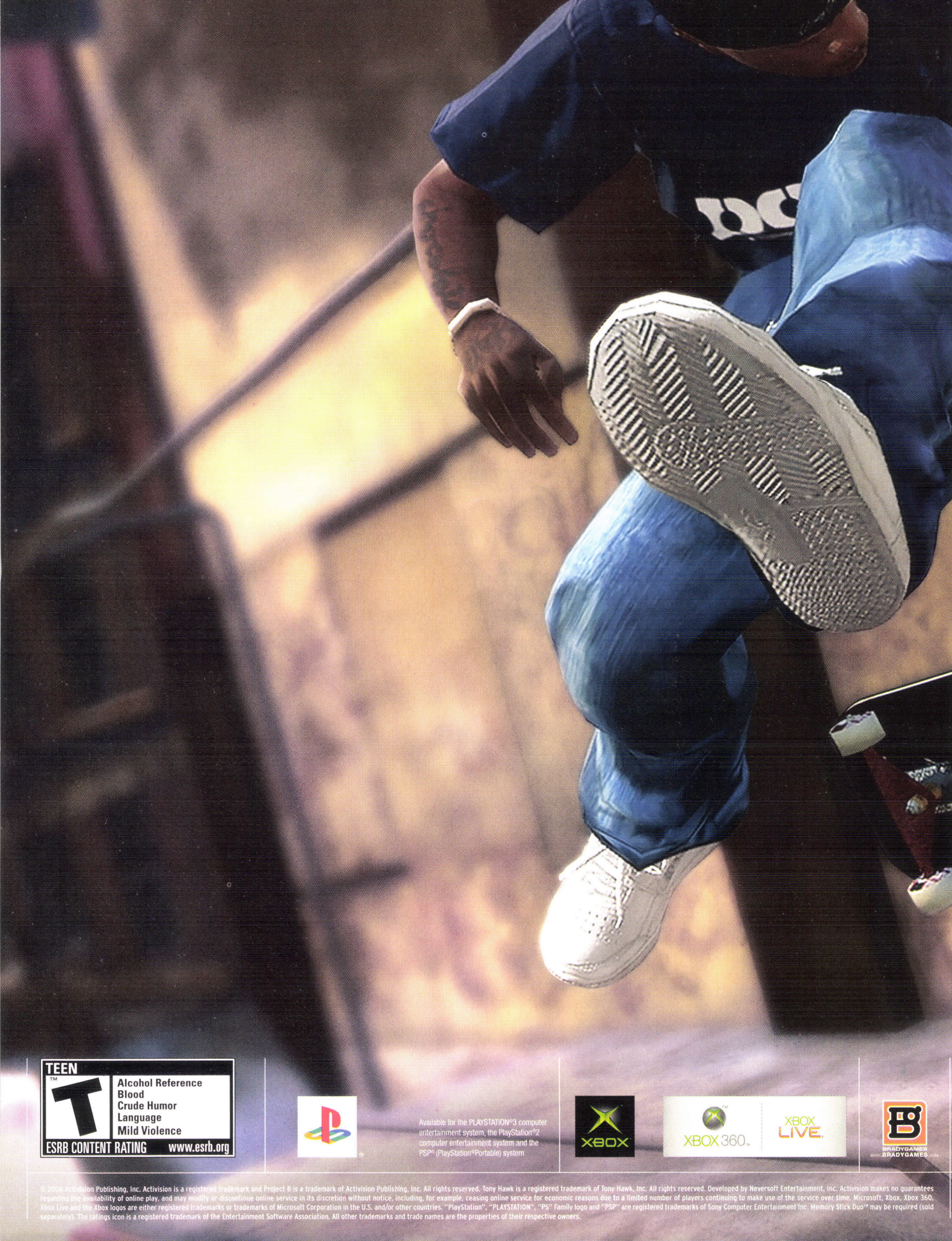
As expected, *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* will include everything from *Ninja Gaiden Black* (new difficulty levels, weapons, costumes, and so on). With all of *NGB*'s content, plus the new stuff, it looks like the PS3 will have the most ultimate version of *Ninja Gaiden* to date.







Perverts will appreciate the ability to control Rachel.



TEEN
T
Alcohol Reference
Blood
Crude Humor
Language
Mild Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Available for the PLAYSTATION®3 computer entertainment system, the PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system and the PSP® (PlayStation®Portable) system

XBOX
XBOX 360
XBOX LIVE

BRADYGAMES
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StevieWilliams switch heelflip
[NAIL THE TRICK]
An entirely new way to play the game, Nail The Trick mode gives precision control over how you move your feet to flip the skateboard. Using dual analog stick motions, you can create your own unique skate tricks - even during a combo - as you watch the action unfold in slow motion.
Yeah. It's that real.
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TEEN
T
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NEVERSOFT
ACTIVISION
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| pub. Sony CEA dev. Factor 5

LAIR

WE'RE HOPING FOR A SEAN CONNERY CAMEO

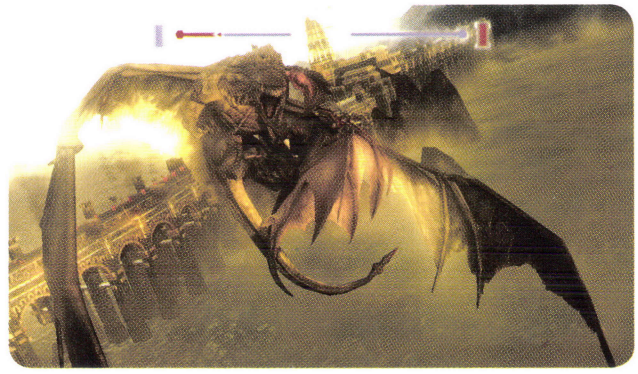


On first appearance, *Lair* seems like any other Factor 5 title (the developer famous for games like *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron*): a pretty game where you fly around and shoot things. What makes *Lair* stand out from other titles in the company's catalog is that it uses the tilt sensor in the Sixaxis controller as a core gameplay mechanic.

So while you'd expect to use the analog sticks to guide your dragon around, you actually steer by tilting the controller: Tilt it toward you to "pull up"; tilt it away to "dive down." Lock onto an enemy dragon with the R1 button, and then either jab the controller forward or hit X to close in. Once you're "dragon y dragon," keep "jabbing" the controller to make the beast slam into your opponent—and when you close in for the kill, you continue to shake the controller to perform kill moves (or be boring and use the face buttons). Factor 5 president Julian Eggebrecht commented that the use of the tilt sensor was somewhat inspired by watching gaming newbies swinging their controllers around as they play—the company decided to make turn those motions into actual gameplay mechanics.

Besides flying around, you can also land your dragon and wreak havoc by running around and breathing fire on hapless enemy soldiers. At this point, the only other thing we want is for one of the dragons to talk with a Scottish brogue.

What makes Lair stand out is that it uses the tilt sensor as gameplay...



| pub. Sega dev. Sega-AM2

Virtua Fighter 5

EXCELLENCE IS A VIRTUE



We'll say it: *Virtua Fighter 5* is one of the best PS3 games *OPM* has gotten its dirty mitts on so far. Sega claims the console version is a perfect re-creation of the arcade game that is currently not available in the U.S. Hey, we'll take their word for it. Side by side, the two versions look identical, and with the inclusion of the arcade stick (also sold by Sega), *VF5* even *plays* like the arcade version.

Just one look at *VF5*'s visuals will have you sweating for more. At 720p, they're colorful, realistic, and as fluid as mercury. As has always been true of the series, gameplay keeps to the more technical side of fighting, and even the early rounds require precise moves and combos rather than button mashing. *OPM* has seen and played the two basic game modes, arcade and versus, but you should expect to see a longer list of standard modes, including training and quest, when the game releases in the spring. All the familiar characters from *VF*'s long history appear, with the addition of newcomers El Blaze, a lucha libre wrestler, and Eileen, a monkey kung fu (check out *Journey to the West*) master.

Unfortunately, Sega has shelved online play, saying it isn't yet able to achieve an acceptable framerate. Multiplayer will be limited to two players.

| pub. Sony CEA dev. Incognito

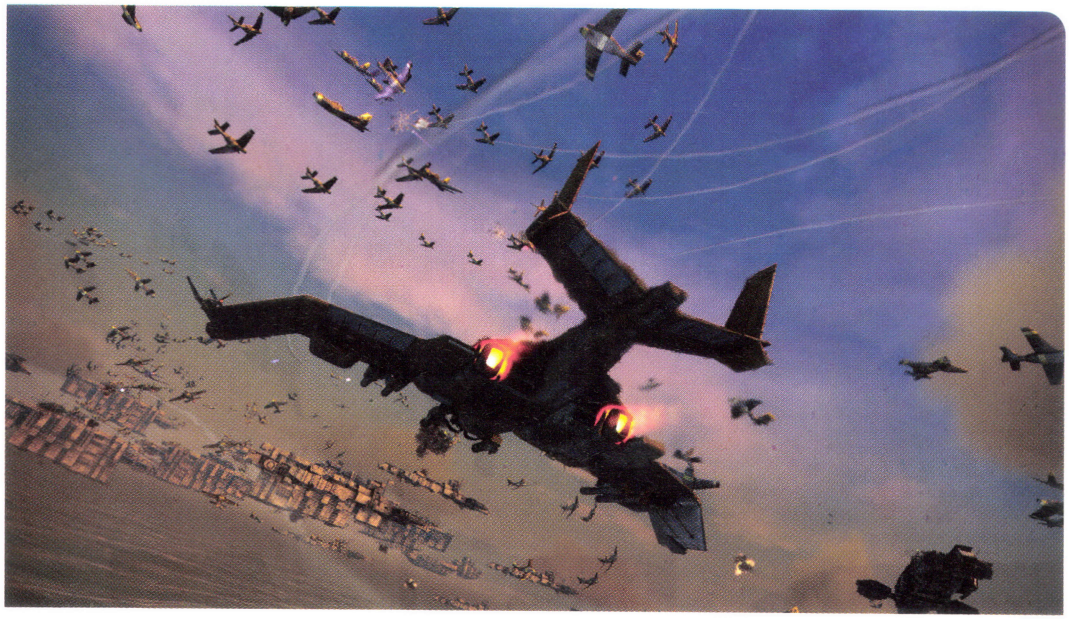
Warhawk

A REMAKE MAKEOVER

For old-school PlayStation aficionados (we're talking 1995), the news that *Warhawk* was being remade for the PS3 brought an instant nostalgic credibility to Sony's new machine. The original flight action-adventure has become a cult classic, and the fact that its creator, Incognito (*Twisted Metal: Black*, *War of the Monsters*), is behind its development is an encouraging sign.

The even better news is that not only is *Warhawk*'s basic formula not being mucked with, it's going far beyond what anyone probably expected from a remake. Not limited only to air combat, *Warhawk* PS3 introduces huge open battlefields in which you control your player on ground, in tanks and a slew of other vehicles and, of course, in hoverjets. Graphically, *Warhawk* is no dazzler (more cartoony than realistic), but that probably won't matter if the gameplay stays consistent with what we've seen so far. In a recent play session, we battled it out online with a total 16 players (the ultimate online count hasn't been finalized) and found the numerous weapons (rocket launchers FTW!), huge maps, and vehicle control smooth and, we'll say it, a lot of fun.

Warhawk has become the PS3's poster child for the Sixaxis motion sensor and, while we think *Lair* might lay better claim to that honor, we actually liked flying the hoverjets this way. *Warhawk* is still several months away, but we think it'll set the tone for online play in 2007.







| pub. Capcom dev. Capcom

DEVIL MAY CRY 4

BIG UP TO YOUR SLAMMIN' BEAT, BOSS!





Last issue, we let slip that the main character of *Devil May Cry 4* wasn't usual protagonist Dante, but Nero, some new kid who looks a lot like Dante (but dressed in blue instead of red, which means he takes fashion tips from Dante's brother, Vergil). Alas, further details about Dante's role in the game (he shows up in trailers and art) and Nero's reason for being the main dude aren't yet available, and a demo we played was strictly about Nero kicking all sorts of demonic derriere in a fancy-looking garden that led to a run-down warehouse and then some docks.

Gameplay felt just like previous *Devil May Cry*s, with the exception of the Circle button; instead of being a "style" button, it triggers the "Demon Bringer." At first, this just seems like a big fiery fist that hurts baddies. Nothing too special. Except the Demon Bringer also snatches the

The main character isn't Dante, but Nero, some kid who dresses like Vergil...

enemy. The first tactical application is to simply use it to close the distance between you and the foe by grabbing them toward you. Another tactic is to use it at the end of a traditional juggling combo. You know, when you're juggling a baddy in the air with a combo that uses both your guns and your sword, and you hit him so hard that he sails through the air? Just use the Demon Bringer to yank him back and beat on him some more. All this with the same goofy words of acclaim for pulling off cool moves ("Big ups!" or "Slammin' beat!") and the same smooth controls at 60 frames per second.

DMC4's biggest problem at the moment? That it's not done, and that it gloats about it. Our play session ended with a massive boss that either says "See you in hell!" or "Coming soon!" before the demo abruptly ends.

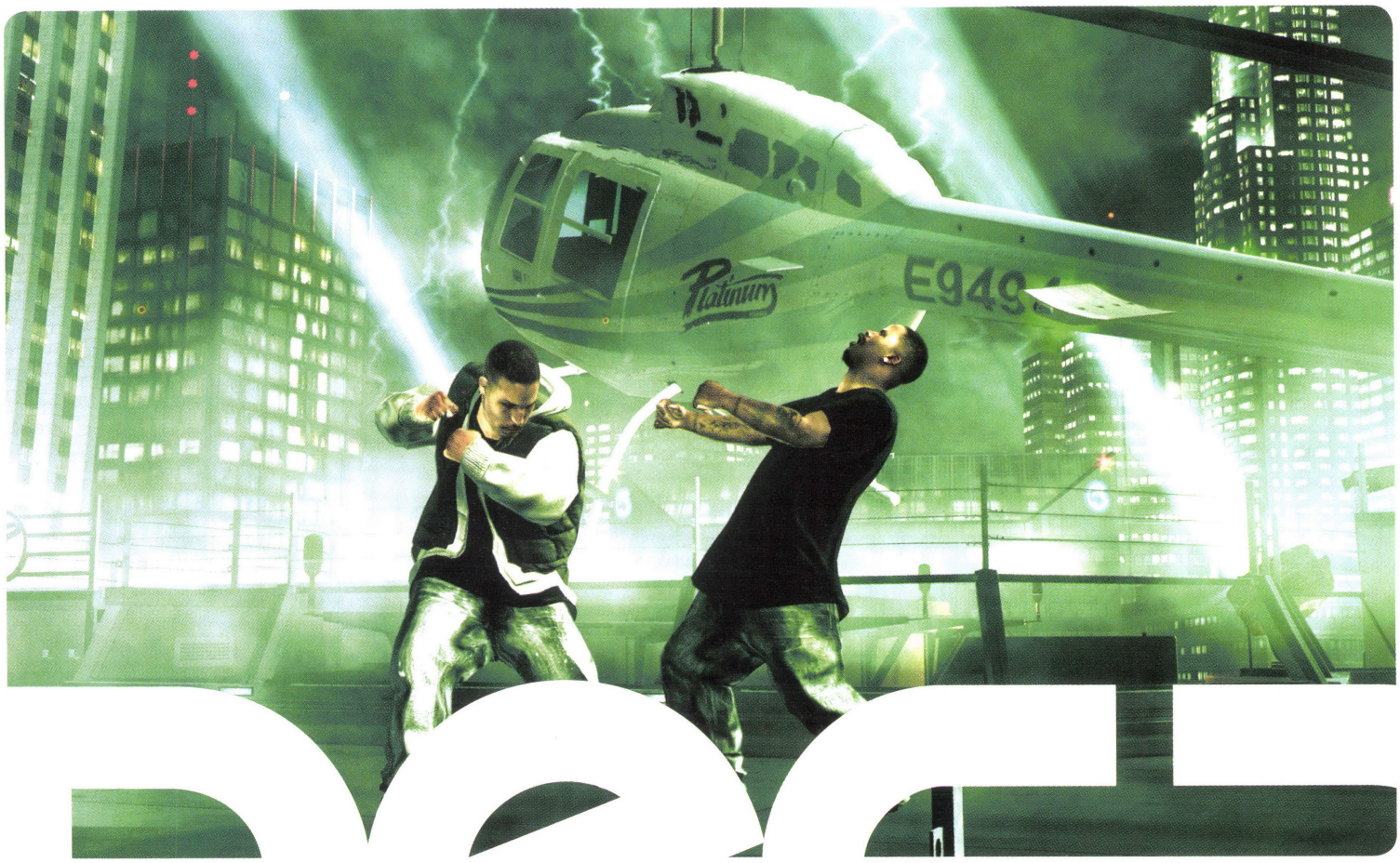












| pub. Electronic Arts dev. EA Chicago

Def Jam: Icon

BOUNCE TO THE BEATS

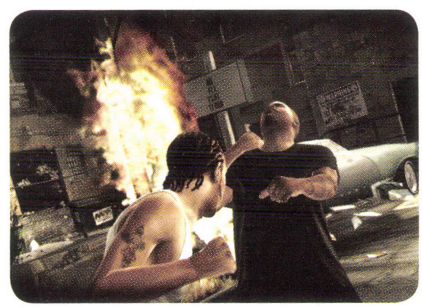
Now in the hands of EA's Chicago studio—the same team responsible for the *Fight Night* series, *Def Jam* is going in for a bit of an overhaul. Naturally, since the series is making the leap to the PS3, this means that the graphics are getting a huge makeover. All of the characters, including famous hip-hop artists such as Big Boi, Ludacris, and the recently announced T.I., are now rendered in incredible detail. Likewise, the environments have received an enormous face-lift as well.

In fact, the environments play a bigger role in *Def Jam: Icon* than they have in previous games. Not only do objects such as skyscrapers bounce around to the beat of the music in the stage—think of it as in-game representation of an equalizer—but they also crumble and fall apart as fists and feet start connecting. This also applies to objects in the immediate area—when they start crumbling, you can use them as weapons against the character that you're fighting.

The connection between the music and the environment extends even further than that. Since each level responds to the song being played, certain events will only occur based upon the type of song and its pace. Basically, some environmental hazards trigger depending on the song; if you have intimate knowledge of a particular tune, you can use that to your advantage. There's even a "DJ Mix" element to the gameplay where opposing players can attempt to change the song while they're duking it out (using the triggers or bumper keys). On top of all that, the fighting mechanics are being tweaked and seem to be a little different than those found in previous games, focusing more on hand-to-hand fighting.

Not only do objects bounce around to the beat...







Danny Way, rendered via the power of PS3!

SKATE

...OR DIE!

| pub. Electronic Arts dev. EA Black Box

Hey, you remember the *Tony Hawk* games? Remember how that series hit its peak a few years ago? Yeah. Anyway, Electronic Arts has decided to jump back into the skating world with the cleverly named *SKATE*. Not much is known aside that the control scheme will be a little different than what we're used to and that several professional skaters have been enlisted already. Too bad they didn't just decide to call it *Skate or Die*—that'd be rad.

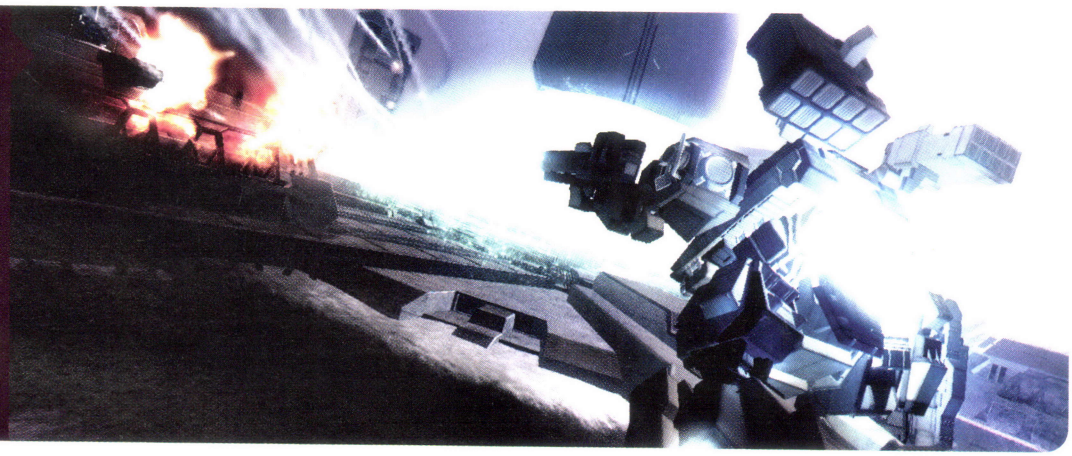
Armored Core 4

YAY, MORE ROBOTS!

| pub. Sega dev. From Software



You can take your core online now!





Battlefield: Bad Company

BAD COMPANY WITH BAD BOYS

| pub. EA Games dev. EA DICE



There might be more single-player this time!

Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War

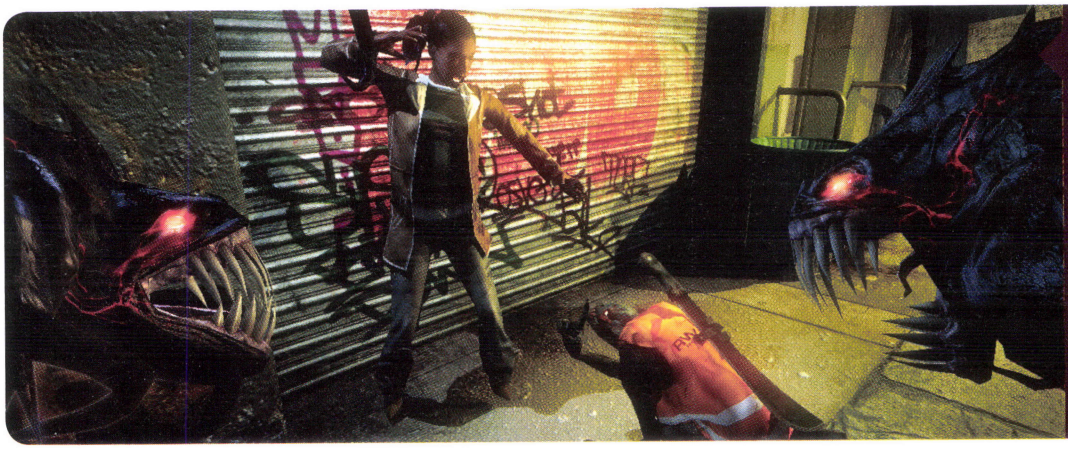
MEDIEVAL WARRIORS

| pub. Koei dev. Omega Force



Koei doing what it knows best....

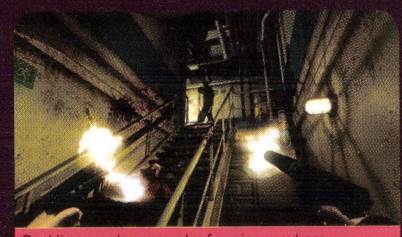




The Darkness

BLACK MAGIC!

| pub. 2K Games dev. Starbreeze



Darklings and guns make for nice mayhem.

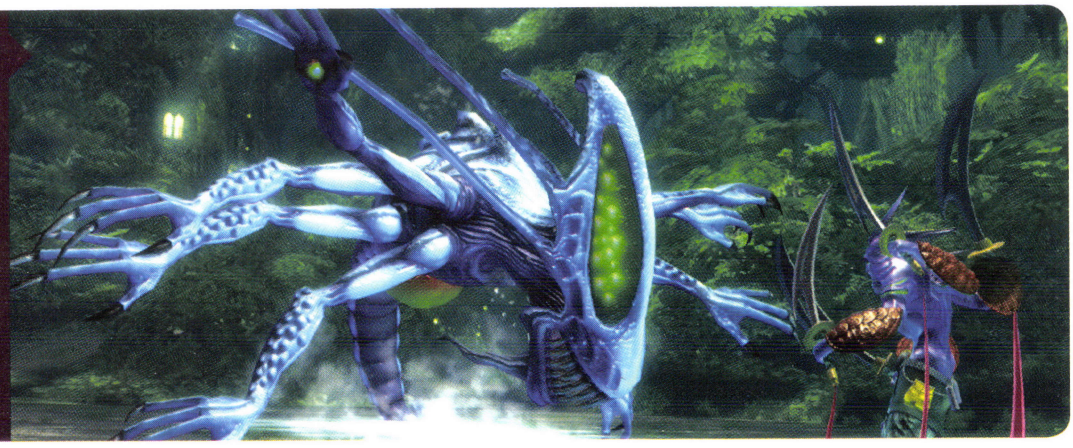
The Eye of Judgment

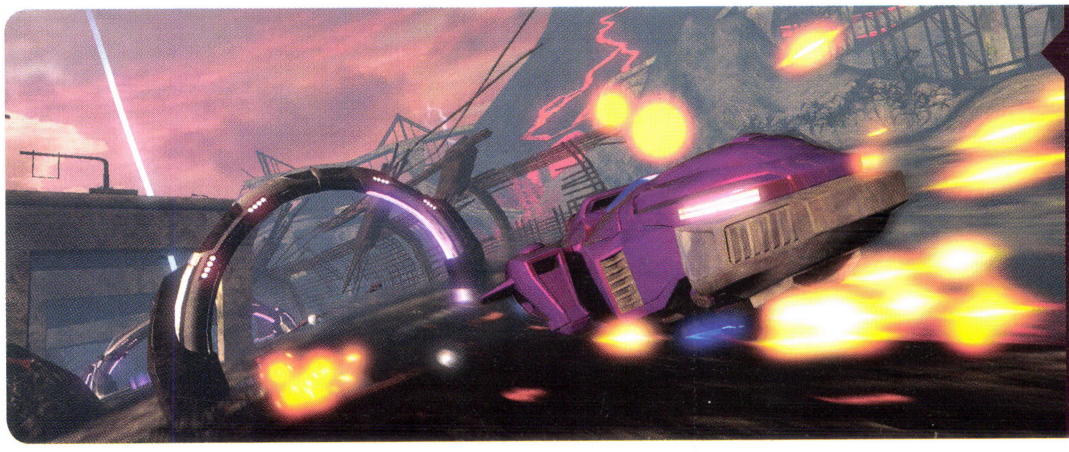
MAKE LOVE TO THE CAMERA

| pub. Sony CEA dev. Sony CEI



One of the EyeToy-supported titles on the PS3.





Fatal Inertia

SPACE RACE

| pub. Koei dev. Koei



Teaching you how to make fun with physics.

Final Fantasy XIII

WELCOME BACK, KITASE!

| pub. Square Enix dev. Square Enix

The first Kitase-produced *FF* game since *FFX-2*.





Formula 1 Championship Edition

REARVIEW PSP

| pub. Sony CEA dev. SCEE Liverpool



We wonder what else you can use the PSP for....

Gran Turismo HD

A REST STOP BEFORE GT5

| pub. Sony CEA dev. Polyphony Digital



Each car takes six months for Polyphony to create.



Harker
(working title)

TIME TO STAB DRACULA AGAIN

| pub. The Collective dev. TBA



"*Buffy*'s gameplay in *Dracula*'s setting"? Hmm...





Heavenly Sword

GODDESS OF WAR

| pub. Sony CEA dev. Ninja Theory

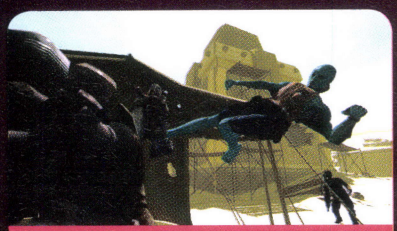


We're glad to hear about the lack of platforming.

Hellboy

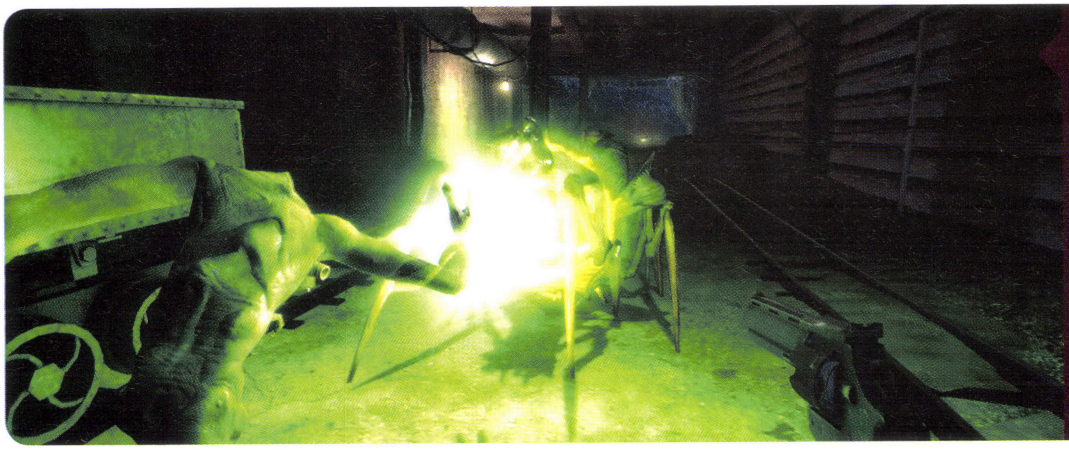
THE RIGHT HAND OF DOOM

| pub. Konami dev. Krome



We hope this features Nazis and lots of falling.





Half-Life 2

PC GOTY ON PS3 OMG!!!

| pub. Valve/EA dev. Valve



HL2 + *TF2* + *Portal* + Episodes = value.

EXPERIENCE THE FUTURE BY WATCHING HI-DEF MOVIES WITH YOUR PLAYSTATION 3

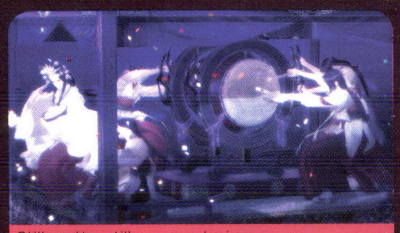


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SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT



Ni-Oh
GAME AS DRAMA
| pub. Koei dev. Koei



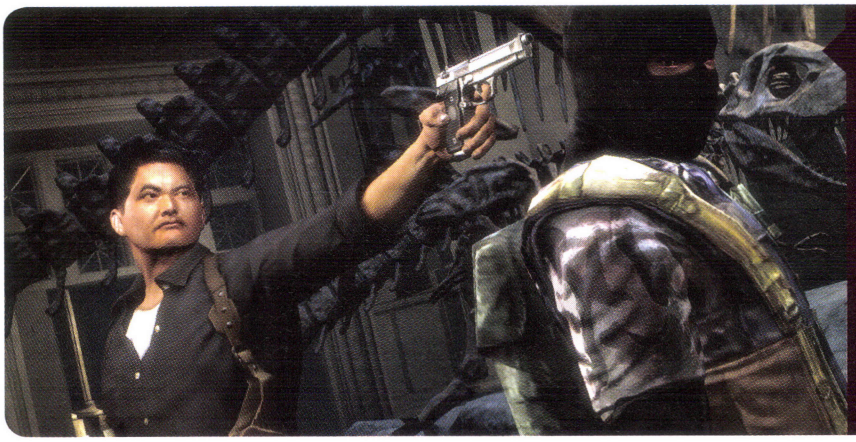
Still pretty; still very mysterious.

Star Wars NextGen
(working title)
A VERY, VERY STRONG FORCE
| pub. LucasArts dev. LucasArts



Yikes, he took down a whole Star Destroyer....





Stranglehold
VERY HARD-BOILED, NOT OVER EASY
| pub. Midway dev. Midway



Chow Yun-Fat likes to shoot up casinos.

Virtua Tennis 3
ARCADE-PERFECT POWER SMASHING
| pub. Sega dev. Sega-Hitmaker



Only home console versions have female players.



MORE PS3 2007

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- Army of Two
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- Burnout 5
- Clive Barker's Jericho
- The Club
- Coded Arms: Assault
- College Hoops 2K7
- Dark Sector
- DIRT: Colin McRae Off-Road
- Dirty Harry
- Eight Days
- Flow
- The Getaway
- Gran Turismo 5
- Grand Theft Auto IV
- Haze
- Heavy Rain
- Hot Shots Golf 5
- Indiana Jones 2007
- Killzone
- L.A. Noire
- Lord of the Rings: The White Council
- Makai Wars
- Medal of Honor Airborne
- Mercenaries 2: World in Flames
- Monster Hunter 3
- Monster Kingdom: Unknown Realms
- NBA Street Vol. 4
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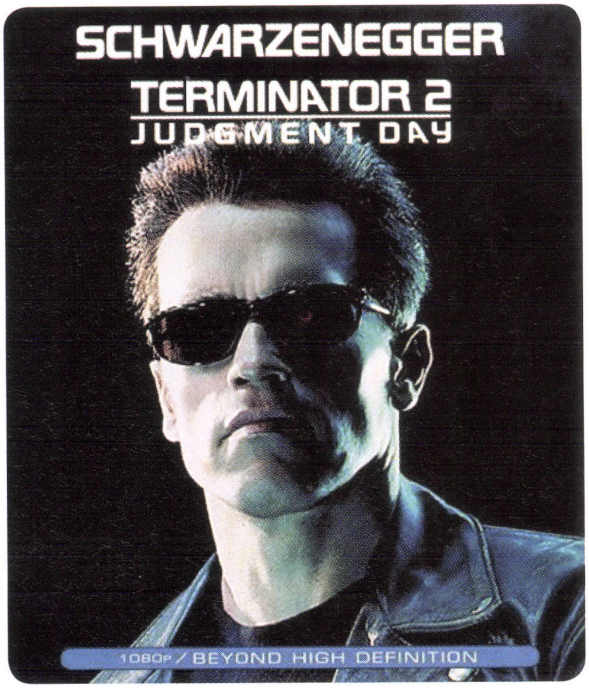
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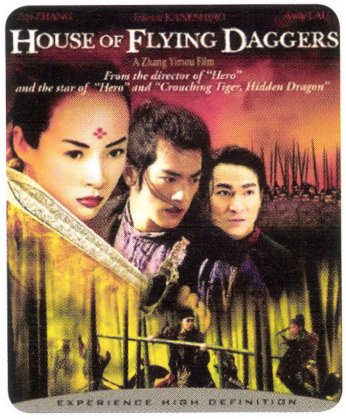
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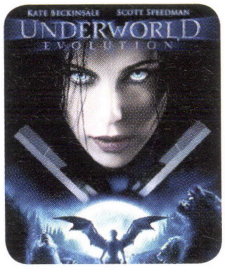
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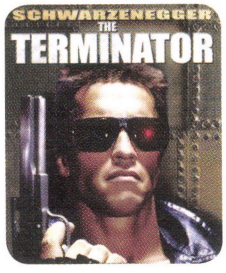
Hype ps3 LAUNCH GUIDE

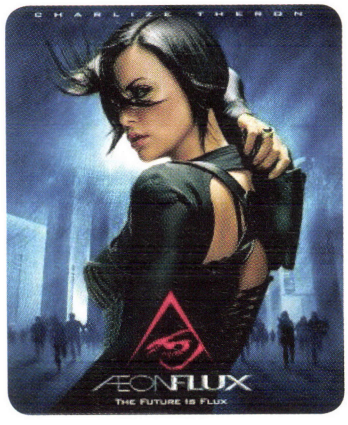
Of course, you couldn't forget that the PlayStation 3 also plays Blu-Ray movies. You're going to want to check out some of the films that will be available by the time the PS3 launches. Some of the older films may not look great in HD resolutions, but anything with CG or anything made within the last few years should look crystal clear on your HDTV. If you still have an SDTV, then Blu-Ray movies aren't so relevant, but they serve as an excellent excuse to upgrade.

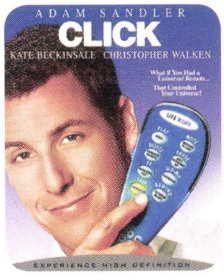




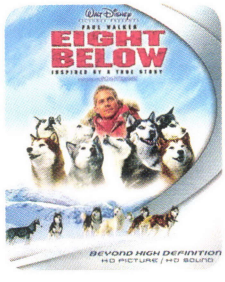


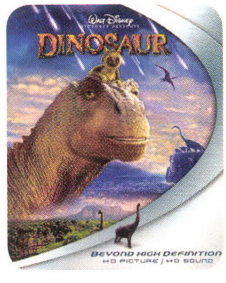












16 Blocks
A Knight's Tale
Aeon Flux
The Big Hit
Black Hawk Down
Brothers Grimm
Click
Dark Water
Dinosaur
Eight Below
Fantastic Four
The Fifth Element
Firewall
The Fugitive
Full Metal Jacket
Glory Road
The Great Raid
Haunted Mansion
House of Flying Daggers
Into the Blue
Jay & Silent Bob Strike Back
Kingdom of Heaven
Kiss Kiss Bang Bang
Kiss of the Dragon
The Lake House
Lara Croft Tomb Raider
Layer Cake
League of Extraordinary Gentlemen
Lethal Weapon
Lethal Weapon 2
Little Man
Lord of War
Mission Impossible III
Monster House
Omen
Phantom of the Opera
Professionals
Reds
Rumor Has It
RV
S.W.A.T.
Sahara
Saw
Searchers
Silent Hill
Sleepy Hollow
Space Cowboys
Species
Speed
Stargate
Stealth
Stir of Echoes
Swordfish
Syriana
Tears of the Sun
The Terminator
Terminator 2: Judgement Day
Tim Burton's Corpse Bride
Ultraviolet
Underworld: Evolution
Unforgiven
XXX

opm ps3 LAUNCH GUIDE

IT'S YOUR TURN!

In many ways, the launch of the PS3 is the most significant event in videogame history. But don't just take our word for it: We want to hear from you. What has your PS3 experience been like so far? Did you pre-order? Did you get the system on the 17th or did you have to wait a while? What games did you buy? What was set-up like for you? What kind of system do you have at home? Are you HD-ready? How was online for you?

Let *OPM* know the answers to all these questions and anything else that comes to mind by sending an e-mail to **opm@ziffdavis.com**, subject header "PS3 and Me." We'll print the best ones in a future issue.

In the meantime, have fun with your new machine. Next-gen is now-gen.



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PlayStation Portable

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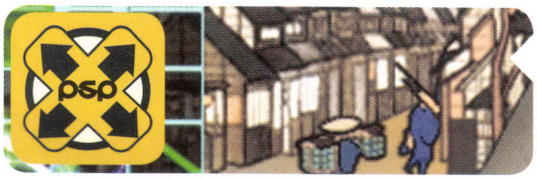
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reviews



Guitar Hero II 124

An improvement on the original? Preposterous! But true...



Gunpey 136

More puzzle love from the makers of *Lumines*.

inside

ps3

110\\\> Resistance: Fall of Man

ps2

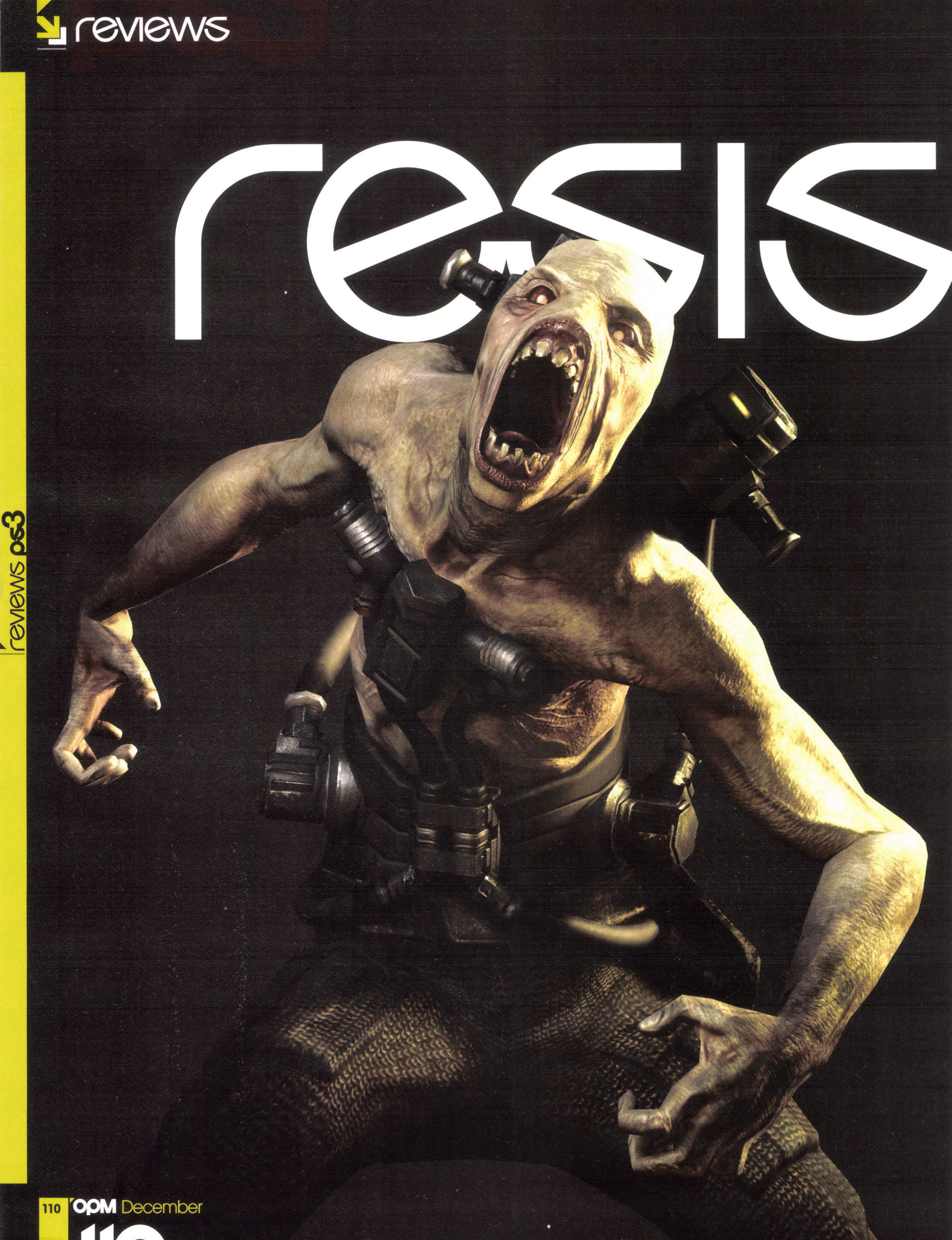
116\\\> Need for Speed Carbon
118\\\> Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner
119\\\> .hack//G.U. Vol. 1// Rebirth
119\\\> Tales of the Abyss
120\\\> Bully
122\\\> Destroy All Humans 2
123\\\> Justice League Heroes
124\\\> Guitar Hero II
126\\\> Mortal Kombat Armageddon
126\\\> NBA Live 07
126\\\> WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 07

psp

128\\\> Killzone: Liberation
130\\\> Ace Combat X
130\\\> Death, Jr. 2: Root of Evil
130\\\> Gitaroo Man Lives!
132\\\> Medal of Honor Heroes
134\\\> Dynasty Warriors Vol. 2
134\\\> Guilty Gear Judgment
134\\\> Power Stone Collection
136\\\> Gunpey
136\\\> Lumines II
136\\\> WTF



resis



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TANCE

FALL OF MAN

EPIC, ATMOSPHERIC, AND ENTERTAINING

| pub. Sony CEA dev. Insomniac esrb M msrp $59.99

This is the game everyone is looking at to set the tone for the PS3. Can it bear the weight of these heavy expectations?

This is it. This is the game Sony's been talking about, the flagship first-party title for the launch of the PS3. This is the game that's intended to usher in the "HD Era," the marquee title for the new system. This is the game everyone's looking at to set the tone for the PS3. Of course, it's not at all fair to lay this heavy a trip on a single game—but fair or not, *Resistance* is the first-party game Sony's pushing the hardest for launch, and that means it has a great deal to live up to. Now the question is: Can it bear the weight of all these heavy expectations?

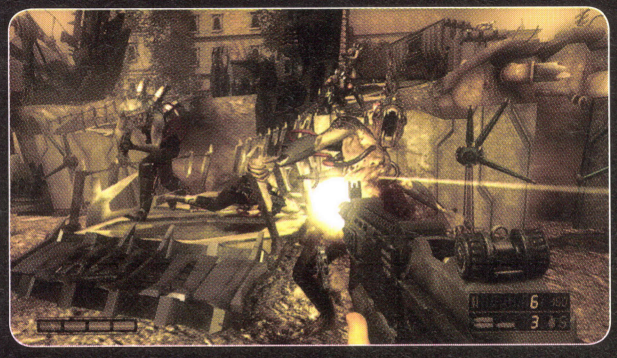
The answer is a reasonably solid "yes." But before I go into detail, let me tell you what *Resistance* isn't. It's not the greatest first-person shooter ever devised, nor is it a revolutionary leap forward in technology. Its graphics won't make your brain explode, nor will they make you think you're living in the fourth dimension.

What *Resistance* is, though, is a really excellent, story-driven FPS. It's a marked step forward in the genre, bringing together elements from some of the best shooters on the market, infusing them with Insomniac's insane ability to craft unconventional weapons, and wrapping them up in a beautifully presented package.

From previous coverage of the game, you may think *Resistance* looks like a World War II shooter. Seeing other screens, you may think it looks like a sci-fi horror game in the vein of *Half-Life* or *Doom 3*. You'd be right on both counts. The game takes large-scale, cinematic action that's reminiscent of epic band-of-brothers WWII shooters and fuses it with claustrophobic, edge-of-your-seat horror segments where it's just you and whatever horrible thing lurks around the next corner. And both elements work really well.

One of the most impressive things about *Resistance* is the very topmost level design. I'm talking about basic pacing, balance, sound design—that sort of thing. These elements all mesh to draw you inexorably into the game. Here's an example: I'm working my way through the streets of Manchester, England with a group of my fellow soldiers. We're slowly advancing on a fairly well-entrenched company of Chi-





mera. We move from cover to cover, popping out and taking potshots at any goon foolish enough to show his face. As we move on, the enemy forces grow more and more dense, until the air is thick with bullets flying from both sides. It's a madhouse, but we keep relatively cool; a few comrades go down, but our losses aren't too high. Gradually, we clean out the area...and it goes quiet.

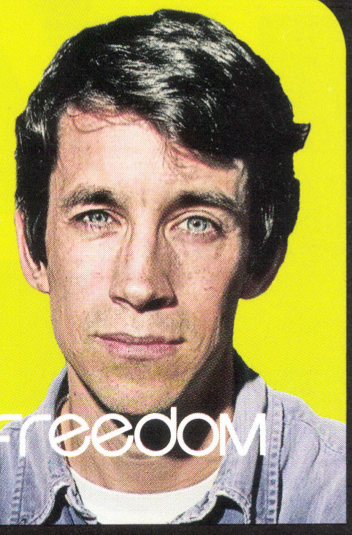
Too quiet. Suddenly, there are no bullets flying, no explosions, not even any stirring martial music playing in the background. It's just our footfalls and the distant sound of pigeons. We know there are more Chimera hiding out somewhere, but we have no idea where. So we move into a narrow street, checking windows and doorways as we go. The tension grows. A house sits open to the elements; I dash in with a fresh clip, expecting to find a raging Chimera kegger going on inside...but it's silent, save for the creak of floorboards.

Back out on the street, we advance slowly, ever more slowly, just waiting for the other shoe to drop. We hear the sounds of a deserted city, but nothing else. After a few more moments, I start to relax, figuring we've passed the worst of it.

We're just nearing the end of a deserted street when all hell breaks loose. Chimera jump out from behind abandoned cars and open up full bore on our squad. I literally jump, open up with machine-gun fire, just spraying wildly in the Chimera's general direction; all my squadmates do the same. It's pandemonium, I've lost track of which way we were heading, and all I'm thinking is that I've got just one bar of health left and nowhere to hide to recharge it if I get nailed. Picture the scene in *Aliens* where Vasquez finally loses her s*** and just opens the throttle of that waist-slung machine gun all the way, screaming and swiveling. It's kind of like that.

When the dust settles, I take stock of our kills: two. There were only two Chimera hiding on this street. But I was so high-strung from the emptiness before that the encounter was as threatening as if I'd faced a whole squad.

interview



The price of freedom

Insomniac's president and CEO, Ted Price, discusses the leap to PS3

| OPM There's been a lot of negative sentiment about the PS3 lately. With your experience with the hardware, what's your take on what people are saying about it?

| TED PRICE I think that when you're on top, as Sony has been for so long, it's inevitable that you're going to be the focal point for a lot of both positive and negative attention. I think that that's just what happens. And I think that people love controversy as well, and everybody's going to hone in on things that are going to make news. For us, we've been having a good time watching from the sidelines, knowing what the PS3 can really do. We've been really impressed with the machine. It's just a monumental leap beyond the previous generation; it's a bigger leap than we've seen in any of our history within the game industry in terms of processing power.

| OPM Is it proportionally challenging? That is, do you think that transitioning to PS3 is as difficult as moving from PS1 to PS2 was?

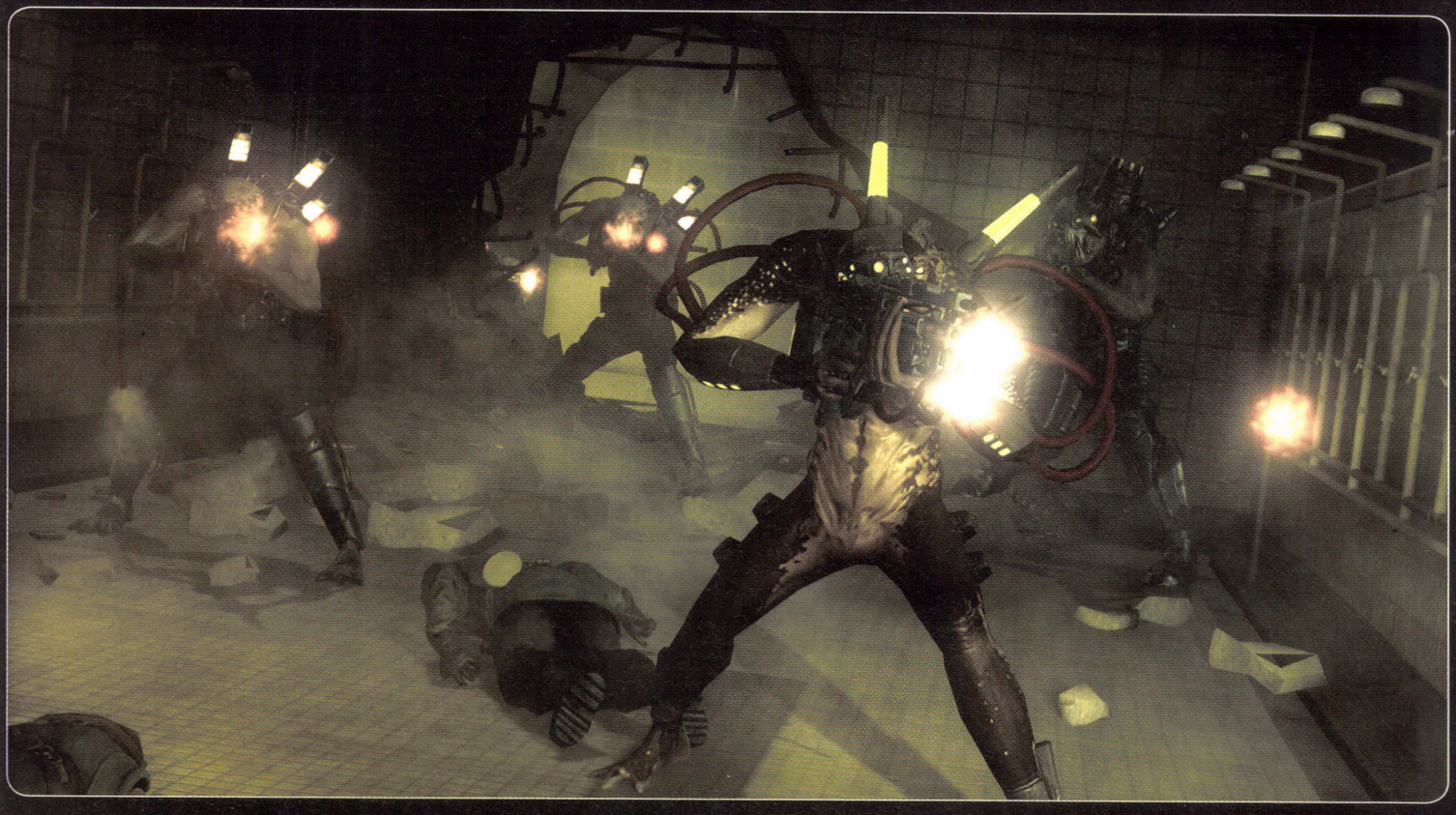
| TP I can only speak for us. We're fortunate in that we've worked on two PlayStation platforms to date, so not only do our guys have experience with Sony hardware, which is important, but we knew what was coming, so we were prepared for the advent of the Cell. We had been doing our homework and working closely with Sony to make sure we could tackle it. So yes, it was definitely challenging because it was a paradigm shift for us in terms of moving from single-processor work to multiprocessor work. People ask, "What's the difference between the PS2 and PS3," and the answer is: everything. It's so different.

| OPM Why did you decide to stick with 720p instead of going for 1080p?

| TP It had to do with the amount of [video memory] we were dedicating to the game. We have really big environments, so when you're playing the game you see a lot at once, and that takes a lot of memory. We certainly could have restricted the environments a bit more...but that's what's interesting about game development. It's a constant juggling act: You take a little bit away here, you add some there. And you're making decisions about what's best for the game depending on what type of game you're making.

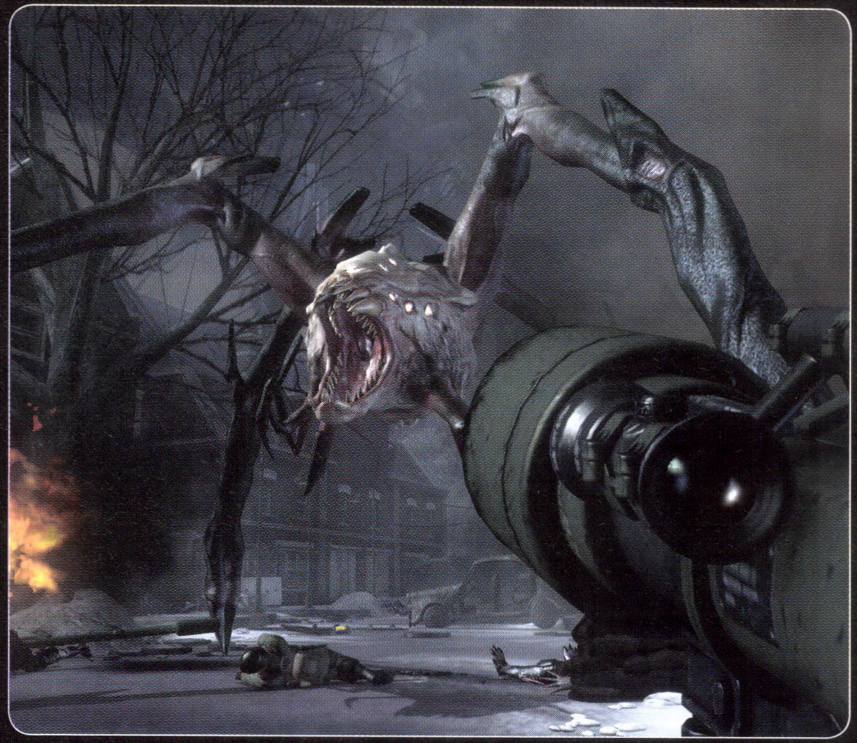
| OPM One of the criticisms people have been making about PS3 games is that they don't look that much better than games on the Xbox 360. Do you think that's going to change?

| TP Yeah, I do. I think you're going to see, for second-generation games, an additional leap beyond what we're seeing [now]. You may not be seeing that for 360 titles, but we're not a 360 developer, so I can't really say. I think the most important thing, though, is that the games are fun. We think this game looks beautiful. We're going to wait to see what other people think. But we're most interested in people having an engaging experience. Because that's key. Absolutely key. Before they play the game people focus on the things they can see, which are screenshots and movies. But it'll be up to you to decide after you play.



This effect wouldn't have worked if all the elements hadn't come together just right. But the combination of the long, empty pause, the effectively minimalist (almost Kubrick-like) sound design, and the depleted health from the previous firefight made this extremely minor encounter into one of the more memorable moments in the game for me.

That fine sense of high design extends into level structure as well. All of the settings in *Resistance*—11 separate areas divided into about 30 chapters—exhibit impressive variety; you move from tightly enclosed spaces to wide-open fields of battle and back again. And while the levels are actually fairly linear, clever design tricks make them feel extremely open.



At the end of a deserted street, all hell breaks loose.

And that openness is a good thing, since it gives you a nice, broad arena in which to make the most of the game's really exceptional weapon lineup. As I mentioned previously, we learned from the *Ratchet* games that Insomniac can whip up some truly odd weapons, and they make good use of this ability here. It's toned down a bit, to be sure—you won't find any black-hole launchers here—but it's clear the developers were thinking outside the box.

Take, for example, the Bullseye. This snazzy little number lets you







send out a "tag" that future bullets will all home in on. Guy around the corner getting you down? Pop out, tag him, and then duck back behind cover and let loose a stream of homing bullets to finish him off.

Or there's the Arc Charger, which links enemies in a sizzling jolt of shared electricity: Zap one guy, and when you hit someone next to him, he takes additional damage. Or the Hailstorm, featuring ricocheting bullets (that actually increase in power after bouncing off surfaces) and alternate fire that creates a whirling turret of doom.

That openness is a good thing.

Even traditional weapons get unusual treatment here. The sniper rifle in *Resistance* boasts an interesting feature, for example: When looking through the scope, you can slow down time to let you get the perfect head shot. And the rockets for the rocket launcher feature an innovative air brake: Squeeze the alt-fire button and the rocket slows to a stop, allowing you to guide it by hand after launching. You can even have it tag along behind you like a faithful retriever. A retriever that explodes. You know, whatever.

With a generous amount of variety in setting and tone, *Resistance* does a nice job of keeping things moving; the 12 or so hours it took me to finish the game on medium difficulty seemed to fly by. And those 12 hours are just the beginning; there are significant reasons to play again. First, the game includes four weapons and one grenade that can only be accessed on your second playthrough. Second, the higher difficulties offer a legitimately new challenge in the form of more enemies (often placed in areas that were quite safe the first time through) rather than just more difficult ones. And finally, there's

UNFRIENDLY COMPETITION

Resistance's multiplayer delivers hot 40-way action

It's clear that Insomniac has learned a thing or two from the experiment of bringing *Ratchet* online; the online component in *Resistance* is exceptionally well put-together, providing a broad, varied, and extremely customizable experience.

Hop online and you'll be presented with the option of either ranked games or custom games. The ranked games are set up by Insomniac according to specific criteria and use a matchmaking system to fix players up with others of similar skill and experience. It's here you'll be able to work your way up the official ladders and earn experience points to advance your rank, unlock new skins for online play, and earn accessories to help customize your character.

And then there are custom games, in which the game host can create an almost infinitely customizable competitive experience: Which one of the six game types do you want? Which of the 11 maps do you want to play in? What weapons do you want in the game? Infinite respawn or limited lives? How many lives? The list goes on.

The game types don't feature anything too out of the ordinary; you've got your basic free-for-all deathmatch, team deathmatch, and capture the flag. Then there's Breach—the now-classic destroy-the-enemy's-base mode—and Meltdown, a *Battlefield*-style control-the-node-point game. The one unusual game type is Conversion. In this mode, everyone begins as a human player. Die once, and you'll respawn as a Chimera hybrid. Die again, and it's game over for you; you'll have to watch the rest of the match through the eyes of living players. The last one standing is the winner.

This brings up an interesting feature of multiplayer: Humans and hybrids have different abilities. Humans have a radar display and the ability to sprint; hybrids don't have radar, but they can engage "Rage mode," which allows them to see through walls for a limited distance and also move faster and do more damage. But Rage mode will eventually cause the hybrid to lose health, so hybrid players must switch in and out.

Although both sides seemed quite well balanced in our playtime, Insomniac is sensitive to the possibility that once the game goes live, players may find ways to exploit one side over the other. To help counteract such dangers, each human-versus-hybrid match is at least two rounds long; after the first round, the players switch sides.

Overall, the vast array of options makes for a really satisfying online experience. It would be nice to see more than 11 levels (especially since only 4 of those support 40 players, with others supporting 8 to 32), but since most of these levels are simply enormous, you'll still see a lot of variety.

While it wasn't live as of press time, Insomniac promises a website in the vein of Bungie.net featuring stats, clan pages, and other community features like blogs. Multiplayer is no afterthought, but rather a fully fleshed-out component of the game.

WEAPONS OF MASS DISTRACTION

Each of the weapons in *Resistance* has at least two different abilities, allowing for fairly advanced tactics, especially in multiplayer. In addition to these firearms, the game includes four different grenades (one of which is unlocked only in the second playthrough), from the basic frag grenade to the devastating air fuel grenade, which emits a cloud of flammable gas and then ignites it.

\\\> M5A2 FOLSOM CARBINE
Primary: Your basic medium-range machine gun. More accurate at a distance than most other weapons in the game.
Alternate: Grenade launcher. Provides endlessly entertaining examples of the game's modified rag-doll physics.

\\\> BULLSEYE
Primary: Shorter-range energy-slug machine gun.
Alternate: Sends out "tags," which successive primary-fire shots will home in on. Alternate 2: Tag an inanimate object to create a swarm of shots, which can be detonated by holding down the alt-fire button.
Multiplayer feature: If another player tags you, you can dislodge the tag by shaking the controller.

\\\> ROSSMORE 236 COMBAT SHOTGUN
Primary: Well, it's a shotgun.
Alternate: Two shells at once for beast-stopping power.

\\\> AUGER
Primary: Shoots powerful energy bolts through obstructions like walls and floors.
Alternate: Creates a temporary energy shield in the environment.

\\\> L23 FAREYE SNIPER RIFLE
Primary: Long-distance head-shot action.
Alternate: Slows down time temporarily.
Multiplayer feature: No slowing down of time.

\\\> L209 LAARK
Primary: Launches rockets.
Alternate: Pressure-sensitive air brake for rockets.
Alternate 2: Fires homing minirockets from an air-braked rocket.

\\\> SAPPER
Primary: Shoots organic mines that stick to enemies or the environment.
Alternate: Detonates targeted sapper shots.

\\\> HAILSTORM
Primary: Fires high-powered, ricocheting bullets that increase in power with each successive carom.
Alternate: Discharges the remainder of the current clip, creating an autotargeting, hovering turret.

\\\> REAPER
Unlocked in second playthrough only.
Primary: Fires right-hand pistol.
Alternate: Fires left-hand pistol. If you fire at one enemy and then move the target, one pistol will stay trained on the first enemy, allowing for dual targeting.

\\\> ARC CHARGER
Unlocked in second playthrough only.
Primary: Shoots bolt of electricity.
Alternate: Tags enemies; successive shots will jolt tagged enemies in vicinity.
Multiplayer feature: If another player tags you, you can dislodge the tag by shaking the controller.

\\\> L11-2 DRAGON
Unlocked in second playthrough only
Primary: Flamethrower. Throws flame.
Alternate: Charges up huge blast of flame that sticks to the environment like napalm.

\\\> SPLITTER (NOT PICTURED)
Unlocked in second playthrough only.
Primary: Shoots out rockets en masse. Hold down button to direct fire pattern.
Alternate: Splits shots into a stationary wall of mini-rockets, which can be maneuvered into enemies.



no way in hell you'll get the whole story your first time through.

And that leads me to *Resistance*'s most significant flaw. While the alternate-history backstory provides exceptionally fertile ground for both the setting and the story, the story itself ends up feeling surprisingly thin. It's told in an unusual style, and it certainly goes beyond the FPS standard (which is, basically, no story at all), but it fails to expand far beyond the fairly traditional alien-invasion or viral-infection trope.

There are significant reasons to play again.

Here's the interesting thing, though: While playing straight through gives you this somewhat thin story and surprisingly weak ending, Insomniac allows players to flesh out the story in unusual ways. For one thing, scattered throughout every level are intelligence documents—primarily journals of the recently departed—that occasionally offer hints for upcoming segments, but more often deliver tantalizing glimpses into a broader story, a story that seems to extend far beyond what the main story line delivers. Beyond this, though, is the game's website, which features an extensive timeline of events leading up to the game. And furthermore, the game itself will offer clues that can be used to explore the website more thoroughly. It's an interesting experiment, employing an element of the alternate-reality game (like the *I Love Bees* ARG designed to promote *Halo 2*) to make sense of the main story of the game itself.

It's nice to see developers thinking outside the box a bit, but I couldn't help feeling like it would have been better to have a satisfying story in the game and then more stuff to find in addition to that, rather than having to do detective work to fill in fundamental holes in the plot. Perhaps I'm lazy.

This is a fairly minor gripe, though...as are most of my other gripes. For example, I found the humanoid Chimera hybrids—by far the most numerous enemy in the game—to be a little too similar; while there's a nice variety in enemy types overall, more often than not you're encountering minor variations of the same type, which can get a small bit monotonous. I also found a couple of the weapons to be significantly less useful than the others, but of course that could just my particular playing style.

Another complaint is that, while the game features an extensive competitive online component (for details, see the Unfriendly Competition sidebar on the left)), co-op play is splitscreen only. The designers insist that co-op is more fun in person, but for those of us who do most of our multiplayer gaming online, the lack of online co-op feels like a significant omission.

To me, though, these are minor quibbles. The bottom line is that *Resistance* is a truly excellent FPS, rich in variety, atmosphere, and sheer entertainment. With a launch game this good, I can only imagine what untapped power lurks in the PS3's innards. **| Joe Rybicki**

VERDICT A supremely competent shooter that excels at top-level design. A few minor flaws hurt the overall score, but not much.

score **9|10**









Need for Speed Carbon

Fighting for familiar territory

| pub. Electronic Arts dev. EA Black Box
esrb E10+ msrp $39.99

Need for Speed continues its *Fast and the Furious*–inspired ways with yet another game full of hardcore pretty-boy racers, way too much neon lighting, and cars that have been so tricked out you'd have to look up the VIN to figure out what the heck you're driving half the time.

Carbon is actually the first story-based *Need for Speed* sequel. Here, your character returns to the city he ran from in *Most Wanted*, tries to right the horrible wrongs he apparently committed, win back the smoking-hot woman he left behind, and rule the streets. Yawn.

Carbon is just like *Most Wanted* in most ways. Roam around the city looking for races—or tangling with the local five-o—to earn cash, pimp your ride, and take back the streets. *Carbon* runs on a turf-based system rather than last year's Black List of bosses. Win races in each area of the city in order to rule that particular turf. Take over one of the four main quadrants and an opposing gang leader will challenge you to a canyon duel, the other main focus of *Carbon*.

Canyon racing is made up of two events. In the first, you have to chase your opponent down a twisting mountain road, earning points by staying as close to them as possible and not sliding off any of the dangerous drops around the curve. In the second event, your opponent takes points back by doing the same to you. It sounds very dramatic on paper, but it's actually very boring in its execution.

Otherwise, we've got almost all the great race modes from the previous games here and a few of the not-so-great ones. Drifting still sucks, with a unique physics model that just isn't any fun to play. And the excellent drag-racing event of previous games has been excised this time around. But everything else is fast and fun, and thankfully, you can get through the game without completing every single event on the map.

The other major improvement is the use of wingmen during races. Take a blocker, scout, or drafter into an event with you to tip the odds in your favor. Except that more times than not, these guys will randomly brake-check you in an attempt to make sure you stay out front and win each race. Again, it's a very cool idea in theory that doesn't really work out when you're out on the virtual blacktop.

Visually, *Carbon* delivers. The city looks great (as long as you like darkened skies and lots of streaking neon lights), the cars look even better, and the new autosculpt option lets you customize your ride like never before. Now, when you bolt on certain parts, you can actually mess with their various design aspects. Make the grille a bit larger, flare the skirt a bit more, make that scoop in the hood obscenely huge. It's a really nice feature that makes your car truly your own. It's just too bad you can't get online and show off your design talent.

The same excellent game of years past is still there somewhere under all these new features, so *Carbon* is generally a good time. It desperately needs some sort of online mode and a more satisfying free-roam mode that actually rewards exploration a bit more. But still, it's a solid racer despite the problems. | Greg Sewart

VERDICT Another solid game, but the whole *NFS Underground* vibe is starting to lose its luster.

score **7.5** 10

Non-Carbonated

One area where PlayStation 2 gamers are being robbed is in the online arena. More specifically: *Carbon* doesn't have one. The multiplayer modes EA's been crowing about for months now are not included in the current-gen game, instead being confined strictly to the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions.

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Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner

Mephistopheles, I choose you!

pub. Atlus dev. Atlus
esrb M msrp $49.99

OK, if the title *Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner* wasn't already wacky enough, the subtitle (which was too long for us to print above) is *Raidou Kuzunoha vs The Soulless Army*. In a franchise that's had pixies fighting alongside Hindu deities or player characters that need to eat other characters, it takes something pretty darn special to say, "Yeah, this is the weird one of the bunch."

It's not just the setting, which is "Taisho period Japan" (aka the 1920s), or the storyline (you play a "devil summoner" detective who's investigating a mysterious and zany kidnapping). In fact, it's the gameplay structure that earns this one its crazy distinction. In terms of gameplay, the last three *SMT* titles for the PS2 were pretty straightforward RPGs: *SMT: Nocturne* was a massive dungeon crawler with a crazy postapocalypse/*Paradise Lost* story, and the two *Digital Devil Saga* games were normal plot-driven RPGs stapled to abnormal tales of creation and hunger. What *Devil Summoner* has done is not only have a more lighthearted storyline, but it's broken away from the traditional RPG formula and has instead created an adventure game with action-based combat and RPG mechanics.

There's no more turn-based combat, although the frequent random encounters are still present. Instead, the combat feels a bit like *Devil May Cry* on superwimp difficulty. You control Raidou as he runs around the field, and can alternate between swords and guns (which have interchangeable bullets). Besides some basic combos, Raidou's other method of damaging baddies comes from summoning demons. After summoning, you can then issue basic orders, but otherwise, your little buddy acts on his own when it comes to casting spells learned through either combat or fusion (an *SMT* mechanic where you combine two demons in a lab in order to produce a more powerful one). Like in previous *SMT*s, you'll want to exploit weaknesses in enemies, both in what bullets you use and the spells your demon casts. In addition, when an enemy demon is weak enough, you can walk up to it and try to capture it in a tube (a kind of precursor to the Ghostbusters' proton packs). Once you've captured a demon, you can use him both in and out of combat (different demons have different abilities to help with certain puzzles) and build up your demon's loyalty to both ensure better combat performance and that he'll let you perform a demon fusion.

Combat is fairly frequent, but in those 10 to 15 seconds in between battles, you're doing things that you'd find in an adventure game, like talking to people, delivering things, or figuring out minor puzzles to help people reach their own goals. There is a pretty solid adventure title for fans of the genre buried underneath all the combat.

While the rest of the *SMT* franchise is nigh impenetrable for anyone except hardcore RPG players, *Devil Summoner* provides a quirky entry point for gamers wondering what the fuss is all about. Experienced veterans might be a bit miffed at the reuse of enemies from previous titles and the sudden drop in difficulty. One can find fault in that each subgenre within *Devil Summoner* (action, RPG, adventure) is a bit weak and simple, but when combined, they all make *Devil Summoner* one of the more unique and all-around good titles out in a market filled with too many typical RPGs, action or not. | Thierry Nguyen

THE SHOULDER DEVIL SAYS A somewhat schizophrenic game that can't decide between adventure, action, or RPG, but still a good entry for *SMT* newbies.

score **7.5** 10

A mad mad monk
Grigori "Mad Monk" Rasputin shows up as a villain in both *SMT: Devil Summoner* and *Shadow Hearts: Covenant*. Apparently, when it takes a poisoning, several gunshots, and a drowning to kill you, that makes you a tough enough dude to be a cool villain to the Japanese.



Tales of the Abyss

Survive the first 10 hours for a great reward!

| pub. Namco Bandai dev. Namco Bandai
esrb T msrp $29.99

Tales of the Abyss starts off as a carbon copy of every RPG ever made. Whether you've played a *Tales* game or any Japanese-flavored RPG before, the sword-wielding noble child, his streetwise friend who isn't allowed in the palace, and wise-but-suspicious mentor who is a master swordsman will only be the first of a long series of suspiciously familiar stereotypes.

Seven years prior to the game's beginning, your character (the redheaded noble child) was kidnapped *so hard* that he got *amnesia*. That ultimate cliché is really a good thing, though: It's actually a symbol of everything that *Abyss* does right. The game takes trite RPG standards, makes you sit through about the first 10 hours hating yourself for buying another game with a cute girl who can control monsters and a mysterious prophecy (called "the Score," fahgawdssakes), and then starts the payoff: an amazingly told and utterly fantastic story.

It's almost impossible not to write off the bratty, metrosexual, amnesiac main character at the beginning. He's a bratty, metrosexual amnesiac! But then he calls the other characters on their casual murders of enemy soldiers during a routine combat. His amnesia turns out to be more than just a lazy backstory. He's actually an amazing character study on loneliness, power, and what it means to grow up. Every stereotype is there to sucker you into dismissing the various characters, so when their stories starts to unfold, they hit you like a blindside from an IED-packed Hummer.

If *Tales* were a novel, then this score would probably be much higher. A boring soundtrack complements graphics that barely look fine. The real-time, control-one-party-member combat is still too frenzied to allow for real tactics. Pick this one up for the story, not framerates or tactics, and you'll be in for a great trip. | Patrick Joynt

PROS Solid Eastern roleplaying with a great cast of characters
CONS Cookie-cutter gameplay and mediocre looks, the world map's framerate

score **5** | 10



Abysses I Have Loved

This game won't take you to *D&D*'s Outer Planes to fight its Chaotic Evil creatures, the center of an escutcheon, 6,000 meters under the sea, or a deep despair. So it's not all bad.







.hack//G.U. Vol. 1//Rebirth

Is that really what I sound like online?

| pub. Namco Bandai dev. Namco Bandai
esrb T msrp $39.99

The *.hack* games are meant to feature players in an online game emoting to each other, so the cut-scenes should come off as a bit unprofessional—that's how people sound in MMOs. But do you really want to listen to people whine online when you're not actually online? With the release of the first volume of *.hack//G.U.*, you once again have the chance to play a game about a character playing a character in a game.

If you have experience in the massively multiplayer games, the characterizations of people in this one (*The World*) will hit uncannily close to home. Player killers, people who think PKing is wrong, extensive message-board threads with idiots debating both sides...the whole thing achieves a level of eeriness and immersion that the original *.hack* series tried for but never quite reached. Extensive out-of-game options like newscasts and forums are swamped with information to peruse.

If you haven't played an MMO, the whole experience is like going to a zoo and being able to see the wild MMO animals without running the risk of being devoured. Foremost among the animals is your character, Haseo, the archetype of an irritating, rash, rude protagonist...but, like he asks an exceptionally kind character, "Are you like this in real life, or is it just your character?" Taking a step out of *The World*, the "real" Haseo you play can be charming and sweet in e-mails and greetings to in-game rivals.

The combat is still simplistic, but choices like team-based super attacks, plenty of cool skills, and your Chosen One special powers mix it up. But really, this is the biggest disappointment with the new series—combat is just OK. It's improved, but it's still not great.

The interface for the out-of-*The World* operating system you use is amazing, though. Hyperstylish, surreal character designs and equipment compliment the silvery-slick OS. But the real draw here is the weirdness of playing a character playing a character interacting with people—who are just PS2 data—playing characters in a game. It's too bad combat wasn't given even more improvement, but this is a solid restart for *.hack*. | Patrick Joynt

PROS A lot prettier than the first games, more combat options
CONS Combat is still so-so—and why not just play an MMO?

score **7** | 10



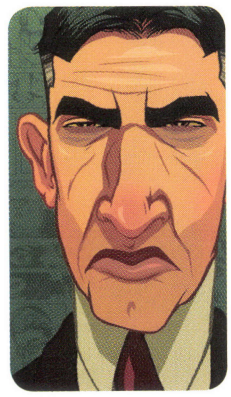
Repeat History

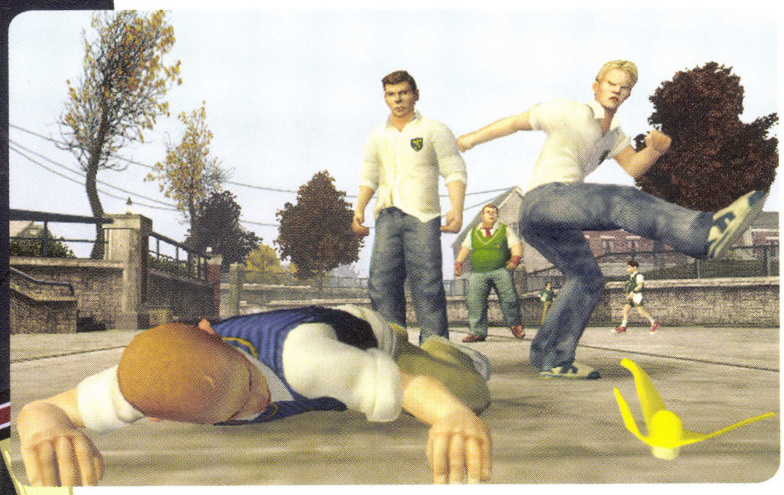
As this is essentially the fifth game of a seven-game series (the four earlier *.hack*s and the two to follow this one), new players face a terrible problem: Play the mediocre first four games or be ignorant at the game's start? There is no good answer.











RANDOM STATS FROM MY SAVED GAME

Classes Attended: 52
Successful Dodgeball Hits: 54
Distance Traveled on Lawnmower: 2.57 km
Mascot Dances Attempted: 11
Firecrackers in Toilets: 1
Rubber Bands Collected: 57/75
Successful Lock Picks: 47
Stink-Bomb Accuracy: 100 percent
Times Kicked in the Nuts: 2
Spud Gun Fired: 101
Kisses Received: 16
Escaped From Authority Figures: 34

Bully

School for scoundrels

| pub. Rockstar Games dev. Rockstar Vancouver
esrb T msrp $39.99

Beloved as the *GTA* games are, I have a hard time getting excited about playing them, mostly because they're just so damn huge. It's daunting to start up a game and know that it will take at least 20 hours before you've made any sort of dent in the story. Which is why I found *Bully* so refreshing: It takes that same *GTA* structure but gives it a fresh setting and story that's focused to a much more manageable size.

As the game begins, main character Jimmy Hopkins is being shipped off to his seventh boarding school by his serial marrier of a mother. The main story revolves around Jimmy's interactions with the various cliques at the school—the nerds, the jocks, the bullies, the preppies, the townies, and the greasers. Jimmy himself isn't too interested in allying with one group or another; his primary concern is looking out for himself, so throughout the game, his status with the various groups is constantly changing. Get on a group's bad side, and when you enter their stomping grounds, they'll gang up on you, making it a lot more difficult to complete a task. And that's actually one of the things I found disappointing about the game—it had been implied that your choices in the game would affect your status with the various groups. As far as I could tell, however, Jimmy's status was only affected by the story missions (which have predetermined outcomes) rather than random fights or favors you might do outside the story arc. It would've been nice to be able to choose to be "bad" or "good."

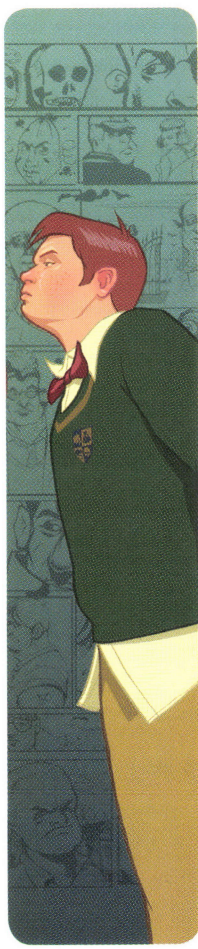
In addition to the main story items, you've also got your responsibilities as a student to fulfill; if you're skipping out on a scheduled activity or out after curfew, authority figures will hunt you down on sight. There are benefits to going to class, though; for example, once you've aced your chemistry class, you'll be able to replenish your firecracker, stink bomb, and itching powder stashes with the use of the set in your room. And as always in Rockstar games, there are tons of side quests: You can hunt for the various collectibles in the game, do odd jobs for money, perform tasks for random denizens, compete in races, play arcade machines, visit the carnival—and on and on. It's always fun to look at the stats page, which tracks all sorts of random information about what you've done, and in some cases, gives you an idea of some of the things you can try out.

One of my favorite things about the game is the dialogue, which is incredibly well written and funny; in fact, the writers' ability to include juvenile remarks that are disguised social commentary reminds me a lot of *South Park*. You can even get insights into some of the influences on this game if you listen closely enough—I was running past a bystander and heard him say, "Stay gold, Ponyboy!" And all of the dialogue is strengthened by the excellent voice acting.

Bully stirred up a lot of commotion before its release, but in my opinion, the controversy was incredibly misplaced. Yeah, you're misbehaving, but I can tell you as a former ninth-grade teacher that what goes on at most kids' real-life schools is worse than most of what you do in this game. No one at this school—students or teachers—is perfect, but even the characters that are parodic representatives of their social groups have their sympathetic side—much as you might find in real life. | Dana Jongewaard

REPORT CARD An excellent antidote for the bored of education.

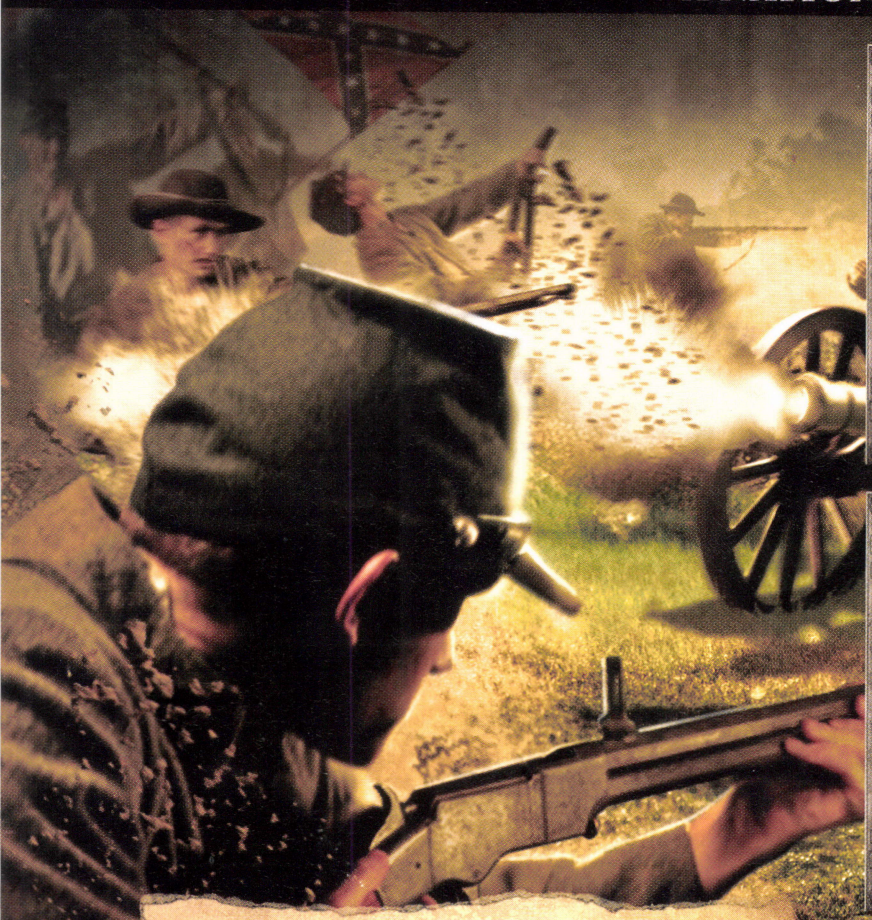
score 9 | 10



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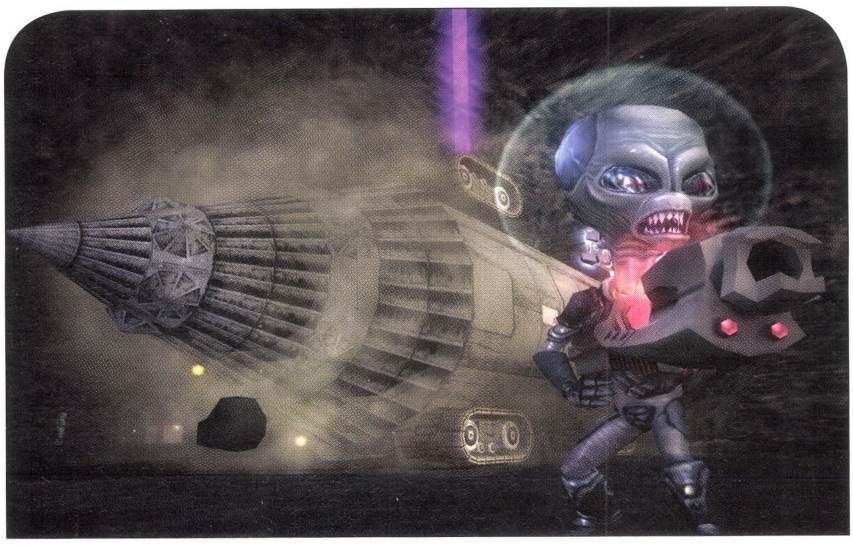
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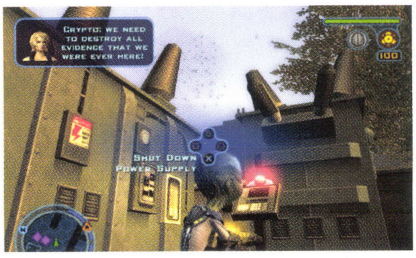
PlayStation.2

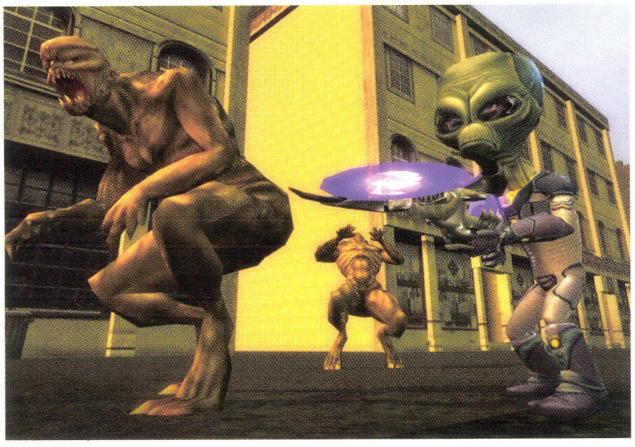
PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

TEEN
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Blood
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ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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Destroy All Humans 2:
Make War Not Love
Anal Probes R Us

| pub. THQ dev. Pandemic Studios
esrb T msrp $39.99

Developer Pandemic has this free-roaming war-game thing down to a science. What with games like *Mercenaries* and *Star Wars Battlefront* on the résumé, it's easy to assume that *Destroy All Humans 2* is gonna be just as solid as either of those two titles.

And it is, mostly.

A lot of the stuff folks found annoying in the first *Destroy All Humans* has been fixed. Main alien Crypto's flying saucer, for instance, was almost an afterthought in the first game—something you messed around with just to kill time. Now it's an integral part of the game; not only is it required to complete certain missions (blow up gas-filled balloons over Bay City), but it's the only way to abduct humans for the sake of gene splicing and earning new abilities.

Vets of the first game will notice slight overhauls like that all over the place. Unlike the first game, *Destroy All Humans 2* doesn't hold the player's hand so much. Sure, the towering purple "objective" lights still guide you to your next goal, but you're not constantly bombarded with tip windows and insultingly easy tasks to complete.

Crypto can interact with just about everything, right down to possessing the hairless monkeys of Earth and using them to gain valuable information on the whereabouts of his next target, or taking the heat off when, say, the National Guard's been called out to exterminate his alien ass.

Not that you'll want to avoid combat altogether. *DAH2* features a nice set of great weapons, all of which can be upgraded to some degree. You'll find yourself wreaking havoc on the local populace just to see what each of your new toys actually does, be it probing their nether-regions or just disintegrating them, *Mars Attacks!*—style.

Actually, it's the game's tongue-in-cheek humor that will keep most people interested long after the various fetch-questing mission and weapons begin to get stale. The great voice acting and hilarious dialogue (a nice mix of commie-crazy McCarthyism and hippie weirdness) is worth getting to the next cinema scene. Just as long as it doesn't bug you that, at its core, just about everything in *Destroy All Humans 2* is one big dick joke.

Issues still abound, though. As mentioned before, the missions can get a bit repetitive. You'll go through a lot of "find this, now this, and then bring this here" type of mission structure right off the bat. Side missions don't offer much reprieve either.

And, while the main characters themselves look great, the various levels suffer from a lot of pop-up and very basic-looking nonplayer models. Where *DAH2* shines in its musical and vocal presentation, it shows real chinks in the armor on the graphical side of things.

But as the PlayStation 2's days as the console of choice wind to an end, *Destroy All Humans 2* is one of the more worthwhile action games you'll find on the system. It's definitely worth playing, but it could have been better with more mission variety and more powerful hardware. However, we won't be surprised to see THQ clone Crypto once again on the PS3. | Greg Sewart

VERDICT A step up from the original game with lots of room for improvement. The jokes still make the game.

score **7** | 10

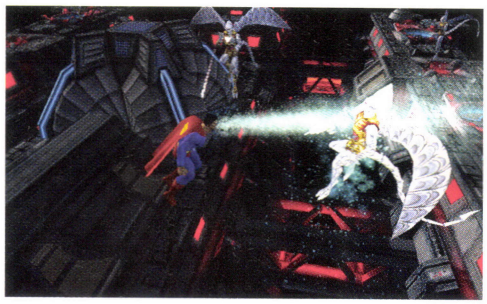
The Name Game

Crypto's full name is actually Cryptosporidium 138. In the real world, Cryptosporidium parvum is the name of a single-cell parasite that can be transmitted through contaminated food and water, and generally causes diarrhea. Yeah, we just thought you'd like to know that.



For a bunch of heroes, this Justice League is a stingy bunch. While you can replay the game using characters you've unlocked, you're still forced to go through the first 50 percent of the game with its default teams. Why can't I pound on the first levels' robots with Green Arrow and Aquaman? Because Superman and Batman are apparently spotlight-hogging publicity whores.





Justice League Heroes

Zap! Ka-Pow! Fizzle...

pub. Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment dev. Snowblind Studios
esrb T msrp $39.99

By the final levels of *Justice League Heroes*, your team of muscle-bound do-gooders will feel appropriately über. Superman is a punishing brute with devastating heat vision, Zatanna is a fireball-spewing juggernaut with awesome healing powers, Green Lantern is blasting vicious plasma bolts and creating brutal giant green sledgehammers, and the Flash...well, he's still a complete waste. It doesn't help that the battle-impotent speedster looks excruciatingly constipated in every cut-scene. Good luck offloading that stack of cinderblocks, Speedy.

The path that you travel to get to that sense of late-game superpoweredness is about as linear and by-the-book as they come. That doesn't mean it's bad—it's just not inspired. Dynamic duos of Justice League members bash their way through a series of levels packed with evil robots, evil gorillas, evil clones, evil interdimensional five-eyed mushroom men, and evil other stuff. Moral ambiguity is not a big feature here. Neither, for that matter, is big drama. The henchmen-level enemies are pretty uninspired and the bosses—the so-called supervillains—are pretty limp as well. Who the hell is the Key and why should I care? Brainiac and another big name make an appearance, but it'd be nice to dig up some other big DC universe high profilers to give this *Gauntlet*-in-spandex some more flavor.

Combat is pretty routine but mostly satisfying. Some of that satisfaction comes courtesy of game environments packed with destructible, interactive objects. It's a lot of fun to watch your enemies bust open a fire hydrant as they're knocked back from a mighty blow. It's even more fun to pick up an armored car and beat them over the head with it.

You won't get to pick your team members for missions until you're halfway through the game, and that just sucks. Thankfully, a decent dose of roleplaying keeps you engaged in the game when it actively tries to drive you away. Not only can you level up characters' individual powers, you can also slot "boosts" into them to pump up their damage, extend their range, and so on.

My suggestion: Get the most from this game by playing with your own superfriends. Like everything from vivisection to white-collar crime, it's just more fun with a buddy. | Robert Coffey

VERDICT By the book, but still basically fun.

score **6.5** | 10

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– Electronic Gaming Monthly



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Guitar Hero II

Painfully good

ps2

OPM GAME OF THE MONTH

| pub. RedOctane/Activision dev. Harmonix
esrb T msrp $49.99 ($79.99 with controller)

Improving on one of the greatest games ever is no easy feat. But *Guitar Hero II* manages the job with apparent ease, tweaking the basic gameplay, refining the interface, and adding some seriously rawking new features.

The most significant change is to two-player co-op. Rather than simply alternating passages in two-player mode, the game now adds a fully fleshed-out second section—either bass or rhythm guitar—to each song. This makes an astonishing difference when playing with a friend; the experience now feels less like a game and more like a *band*.

To make the most of this new setup, the developers make some really interesting choices for the song list. Yes, you've got your classic rock, your nu metal, and your grunge, but there are also a few bass-heavy songs obviously chosen for the two-player glory. The most challenging of these are, without a doubt, Primus' "John the Fisherman" and Rush's "YYZ." They may seem a little odd in single-player, when you're just playing lead guitar (sadly, there's no single-player bass or rhythm except in the practice mode—more on that later), but as soon as you fire up the bass parts, you know why they're there.

As for the rest of the list? It is—dare I say?—finer even than that of the first game. Just taking three examples: Foo Fighters' "Monkey Wrench" is simply a stellar example of chord-heavy play, while the Stones' "Can't You Hear Me Knocking" hits all the right blues notes, and Lamb of God's "Laid to Rest" provides the *totally freakin' metal* finger workouts. But don't think these three songs represent the whole spectrum of tunes here; in fact, the lineup is almost startlingly diverse, including surf rock, hair metal, and even light alterna-pop courtesy of Matthew Sweet's "Girlfriend."

Just as important as the strong soundtrack is the fact that almost all of these songs are simply a blast to play. And, unlike in the first game, they're not just a blast on hard or expert difficulty; this time around, there are far more occasions to feel the rush of playing a really difficult passage, even when what you're actually playing isn't that tough. I'm sure that part of the improvement is that hammer-ons and pull-offs—by far the toughest sections of the first game—are much more forgiving here.

That's not to say that the game as a whole is more forgiving, however. Now the higher levels are really, really, *really* tough. When playing on expert—and even some of the later songs on hard—your hand will be in pain. You will be weeping like a little girl. You will cry for your mother. Do not be ashamed; you will not be alone.

But you won't be weeping forever, since the game now includes an extraordinarily robust practice mode that lets you play any section of any unlocked song without fear of busting out. You can even slow down the speed to nail those really tough segments.

In case you haven't gotten the point by now, *Guitar Hero II* rocks. It rocks hard. It bests the original in nearly every way, and that's a damn hard thing to do. | Joe Rybicki

VERDICT Two of these way, way up: \m/

score 10 10

Even the score

If you ever felt cheated in the first *Guitar Hero*'s face-off mode—you know, where the other guy got all the easy passages—you'll be pleased to know that you can unlock "pro face-off" mode in *Guitar Hero II*. In this mode, both players play the exact same lines. Also, don't overlook multiplayer in general; you can unlock things in two-player that you can't in career mode.



THE TRACK LIST

OPENING LICKS
"Shout at the Devil" – Mötley Crüe
"Mother" – Danzig†
"Surrender" – Cheap Trick
"Woman" – Wolfmother
"Tonight I'm Gonna Rock You Tonight" – Spïnal Tap†

AMP-WARMERS
"Strutter" – KISS†
"Heart-Shaped Box" – Nirvana
"Message in a Bottle" – The Police
"You Really Got Me" – Van Halen
"Carry On Wayward Son" – Kansas

STRING SNAPPERS
"Monkey Wrench" – Foo Fighters
"Them Bones" – Alice in Chains
"Search and Destroy" – Iggy Pop and the Stooges
"Tattooed Love Boys" – The Pretenders
"War Pigs" – Black Sabbath

THRASH AND BURN
"Cherry Pie" – Warrant
"Who Was in My Room Last Night?" – Butthole Surfers†
"Girlfriend" – Matthew Sweet†
"Can't You Hear Me Knocking" – The Rolling Stones†
"Sweet Child O' Mine" – Guns N' Roses

RETURN OF THE SHRED
"Killing in the Name" – Rage Against the Machine
"John the Fisherman" – Primus*
"Freya" – The Sword
"Bad Reputation" – Thin Lizzy
"Last Child" – Aerosmith†

RELENTLESS RIFFS
"Crazy on You" – Heart
"Trippin' On a Hole in a Paper Heart" – Stone Temple Pilots
"Rock This Town" – Stray Cats
"Jessica" – The Allman Brothers Band†
"Stop" – Jane's Addiction*

FURIOUS FRETWORK
"Madhouse" – Anthrax
"Carry Me Home" – The Living End
"Laid to Rest" – Lamb of God†
"Psychobilly Freakout" – Reverend Horton Heat
"YYZ" – Rush

FACE-MELTERS
"Beast and the Harlot" – Avenged Sevenfold
"Institutionalized" – Suicidal Tendencies†
"Miserlou" – Dick Dale
"Hangar 18" – Megadeth
"Freebird" – Lynyrd Skynyrd†

BONUS TRACKS
"Raw Dog" – The Last Vegas*
"Arterial Black" – Drist*†
"Collide" – Anarchy Club*
"Elephant Bones" – That Handsome Devil*
"Fall of Pangea" – Valient Thorr*
"FTK" – Vagiant*
"Gemini" – Brian Kahanek*†
"Push Push (Lady Lightning)" – Bang Camaro*
"Laughtrack" – The Acro-Brats*†
"Less Talk More Rokk" – Freezepop*†
"Jordan" – Buckethead*
"Mr. Fix-It" – The Amazing Crowns*
"The New Black" – Every Time I Die*
"One for the Road" – Breaking Wheel*
"Parasite" – The Neighborhoods*
"Radium Eyes" – Count Zero*
"Red Lottery" – Megasus*
"Six" – All That Remains*
"Soy Bomb" – Honest Bob and the Factory-to-Dealer Incentives*†
"The Light That Blinds" – Shadows Fall*
"Thunderhorse" – Dethklok*
"Trogdor" – Strong Bad*†
"X-Stream" – Voivod*
"Yes We Can" – Made in Mexico*

* Original recording

† Play rhythm guitar in co-op (all others bass)



Guitar Mania Freedom V Wireless Guitar Controller

Manufacturer The Ant Commandos MSRP $54.99

When you're at the store picking up your copy of *Guitar Hero II*, you might see these wireless controllers sitting there on the shelves. And you may wonder if they're worth picking up over the $40 SG controller made by RedOctane.

The answer: Uh, maybe. On the plus side, well...it's wireless. Wireless is good. Wireless makes for easier (or at least safer) jumps, kicks, and splits. And the Guitar Mania's brand of wireless seems utterly lag-free; I was able to pull off the lead run in Dick Dale's "Miserlou" from a distance of about 20 feet. Also in the plus column is the fact that the fret buttons have a smaller area of travel, making it a tad easier to pull off intricate hammer-ons and pull-offs, and also helping to reduce hand fatigue.

But the button construction also makes chord changes a little more difficult; I found my fingers had a tendency to catch on the buttons since they stick out a bit more on the neck. And that's not the only questionable design decision: The Start button, for example, is pretty much exactly where you're likely to rest the heel of your picking hand. I also found the tilt-sensor to be extremely sensitive; more than once I set off the Star Power just by hitting the whammy bar a little too hard. Another problem is that the original (blue) version of this guitar does not appear to work with *Guitar Hero II* at all. So be careful you grab the right one.

Those gripes aside, though, it's a wireless *Guitar Hero* controller that works as advertised. And that's definitely a good thing.

VERDICT Get 'em before the RedOctane lawsuit drives 'em off shelves.

score **7**/10



Mortal Kombat Armageddon

No

| pub. Midway dev. Midway
esrb M msrp $49.99

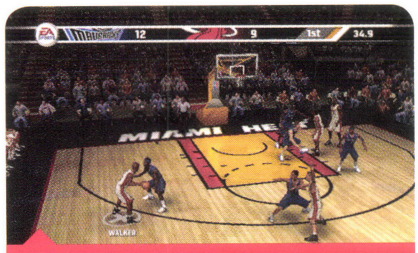
Mortal Kombat is like that dog you've had for something like 15 years. He's old, he has hip problems, he has trouble seeing, and couldn't hear a shotgun blast even if it was two feet away, but you don't put him out of his misery because you just don't want to let go. You're in denial that the dog has any sort of problems because you're scared of what life would be without him. You remember all of the good times, like the first day he came home and all of the crazy habits he's developed as a result of being a part of your family. You're too afraid to even consider the notion of putting him to sleep, but at some point you realize that his misery outweighs your selfish desire to keep him alive and that the deed must be done. It's time for *Mortal Kombat* to go.

And *Armageddon* is the final ailment that will push you over the edge to end your relationship with the series. The fighting mechanics are clunky and outdated to the point where the game almost feels unplayable, or at least, very amateurish. It's almost like *Armageddon*'s unrepentant thirst to display as much gore as possible has totally overridden any desire to make a fun fighting game. Granted, the gore is probably the only reason why anyone under the age of 15 will give *Mortal Kombat* a shot while fighting aficionados will look on in horror—not at the guts and blood spraying about the screen but at how flat-out terrible the game looks.

Actually, in some ways, it seems that even the development team feels similarly about the state of *Mortal Kombat*—to the point that they wanted to include a half-assed kart-racing mode featuring super-deformed versions of popular characters. Then there's the Konquest mode, seemingly *Mortal Kombat*'s answer to *God of War*, but with awesome Dreamcast-quality graphics and gameplay mechanics from 1998. To be fair, the Konquest mode is actually more fun than any other part of the game. But there's no reason you subject yourself to either form of torture regardless. | Giancarlo Varanini

PROS Konquest mode was fun at first, online play, 50 characters
CONS Everything else

score **3** 10



NBA Live 07

Live doesn't live up to 2K7

| pub. EA Sports dev. EA Canada
esrb E msrp $39.99

For ages ***NBA Live*** has been the arcadey basketball alternative for those who weren't able to excel at *NBA 2K*'s masterful simulation. But this year EA slapped handcuffs on gamers trying to shoot over 50 percent from the field. The game defaults to the All-Star skill level, so even if you work your tail off to get open shots, it won't matter—you'll still clang the rim more times than not. It's the height of frustration. You could, of course, drop down a skill level, but then your shooting will go from anemic to sensational, which is equally not fun.

The shooting issues will have you forgetting any attempt at 15-footers and instead focusing on either long-range bombs or shots from the paint. While you'll be lucky to sink 25 percent from outside the arc, there's a dedicated dunk and layup button to help you in the lane. But while it's nice to know you can attempt a dunk with a button press, many times you won't be in perfect position so you'll end up tossing up a lazy layup that will ride the rim before slipping off.

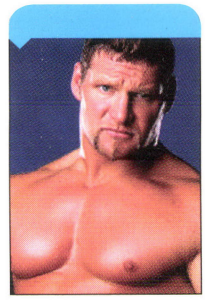


To aid the missed shots and flubbed dunks, the superstar mode—the game's gimmick/saving grace—gives elite players access to special moves to make them unstoppable. Which is your only chance against the CPU as it plays lockdown defense, but shimmies past you without too much effort. However, while dunkers and sharpshooters earn their paychecks, the passing element doesn't fool defenders and is just for show. | Todd Zuniga

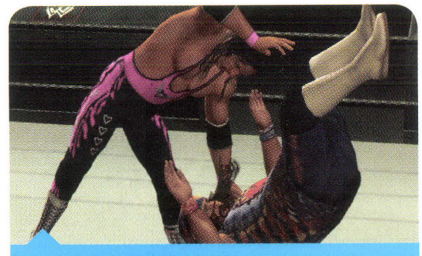
PROS Players won't slide around anymore—unless they're taking a charge
CONS Shooting is tough, dedicated dunk button needs tweaks, $10 more than *2K7*

score **5** 10

The Iceman
During the 2002-2003 season, the NBA compared current stars to past greats. *NBA Live 07* cover athlete Tracy McGrady drew comparisons to finger-roll maestro George "The Iceman" Gervin.



Get Out the Vote
In one of the more bizarre pairings we've seen, the WWE's Smackdown Your Vote campaign featured conversations with Senate majority leader Bill Frist and RAW wrestler Val Venis. Uh, OK.



WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2007

Finally, a shot of innovation!

| pub. THQ dev. Yuke's
esrb T msrp $49.99

I can barely believe it.

For the first time in I can't remember how long, the yearly *WWE* game is actually fun to play! And it's all thanks to a much-needed control overhaul of the franchise.

Button mashing isn't completely a thing of the past, unfortunately. If you happen to be on the losing end of a severe beatdown, you'll still find yourself jamming on the controller until your fingers are bleeding, willing your wussy superstar back up on his or her feet. But in general, controlling the action in the squared circle is now all about timing, location, and strategy. Well, the first two, anyway.

Along with standard and strong grapples with which to set up any number of moves (all done with the right analog stick, thank you very much), players also have the freedom of special moves and location-specific attacks that they can control directly via various stick waggling. Pull your adversary over to the ropes and throw him on for a bit of nad bouncin', or drag him to the turnbuckle and nail him with however many face-crunchin' punches you like. It's all so easy to do, and it's so satisfying. And it's all fully reversible, too, if you can get the timing down.

SmackDown vs. Raw still has some issues, of course. Most of those have to do with brain-dead tag-team partners and the inability to interrupt hold and grapple moves as the third man—they're the same issues that have plagued this series for years now.

But it finally seems as though developer Yuke's is serious about fixing this franchise, and it's got the most important step out of the way. I actually feel like I'm controlling the action in the ring now, and I have so many interesting ways of beating the crap out of my opponents. Hopefully, the last of the major issues will be corrected in next year's iteration. But until then, *SmackDown vs. Raw 2007* is a decent way to pass the time. Holla! | Greg Sewart

VERDICT The yearly *WWE* installment continues to improve each time. This one is actually worth playing!

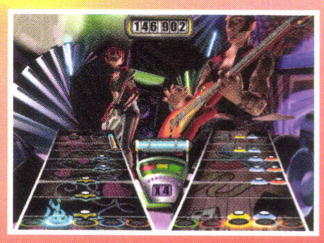
score **7** 10

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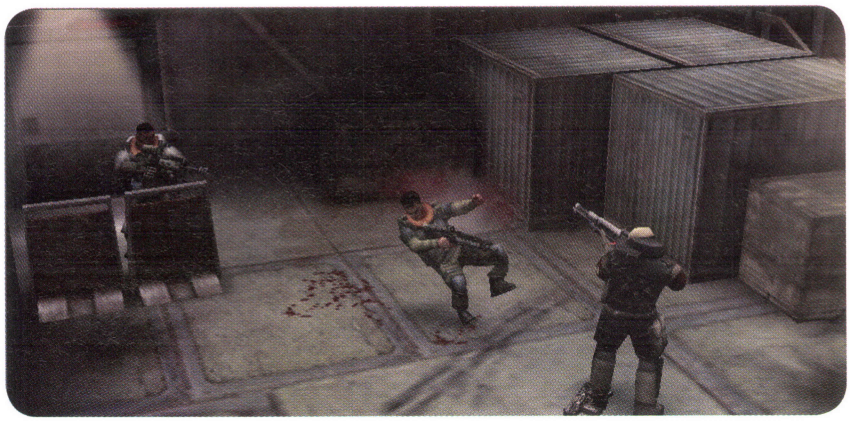


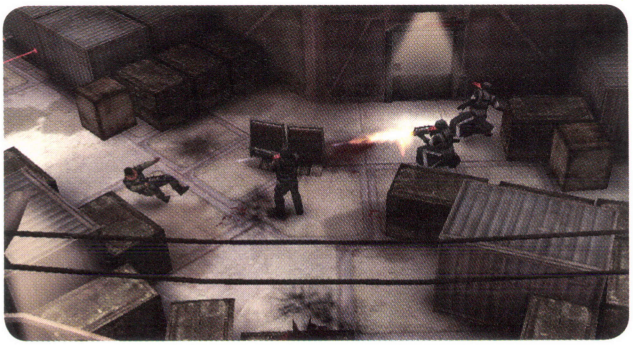
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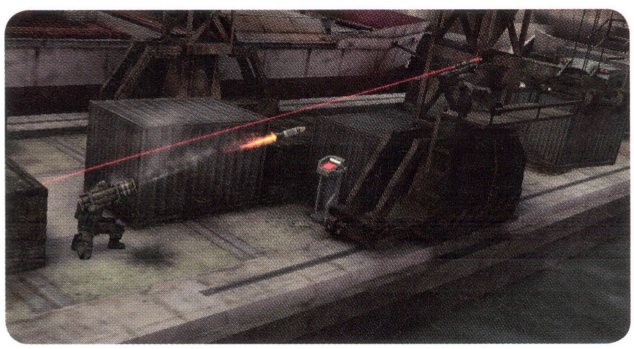
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Killzone: Liberation

Something to play when riding through the danger zone

| pub. Sony CEA dev Guerilla Games
esrb M msrp $39.99

Remember when we all got excited that PSP games could look a lot like PS2 games? Yeah, so did I, until I realized that meant that most PSP titles are just ports of PS2 games—ports with different control schemes. *Killzone: Liberation* is rather, er, "liberating" because it's an original stand-alone title that embraces the PSP's control layout (for the most part).

Killzone: Liberation accomplishes this with a simple twist: shifting the game from first-person perspective to third-person isometric perspective. By making the whole game top-down, *Liberation* manages to maintain the feel and pacing of the FPS original (i.e., lots of shooting, shouting, and grenading—with the added bonus of occasional driving), but without the whole "Er, how do we move and aim with only one analog nub?" problem. The nub moves you around, and you simply aim in whichever direction you're facing, with the Square button being your actual trigger finger (the R button is used to crouch behind cover). The other noteworthy control mechanism is that the D-pad is used to issue commands to your buddy (you occasionally team up with either Rico or Luger, returning characters from the first game). Surprisingly, the buddy AI isn't totally idiotic; comrades follow orders, do an OK job of fighting, and rarely get in your way or trigger traps.

While the controls are pretty solid, they aren't perfect. It's still a bit tricky to hit your opponents; while you're swinging around trying to get a bead on the baddie, he has a pretty easy time hitting you with his rocket (which artificially ramps up the difficulty at times). To be fair, there's a bit of autoaiming; if your gun is aimed reasonably close to the target, you might hit it. But it's kind of weird to have a lock on for objects, but not one for people—I would've gladly given up the strafe command (L button) for a target lock.

However, such a concern pretty much goes away once you play multiplayer. For one, the campaign is fully co-op, meaning you can go through the whole game with a real buddy. Having a real pal alongside to shoot the crap out of Helghast soldiers takes the bite out of their uncanny accuracy.

While the single-player game has a few faults (the scarcity of ammo, artificial difficulty via enemies that can kill you in two hits while you need to hit them 22 times, escort missions, goofy "challenge" minigames), the multiplayer helps elevate the overall game into a pretty well-rounded product; one might be able to consider this a showcase title for the PSP. | Thierry Nguyen

LIBERATION DAY A pretty good single-player is boosted by nice multiplayer options to make a pretty PSP package.

score **7.5** 10

The Goggles!
Probably the most striking visual in *Killzone* is the eerie red glow of the Helghast's goggles. Said glow is now an indication of enemy awareness; yellow eyes mean they're blissfully unaware, orange means they're suspicious, and red means they know you're out there.

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Death, Jr. 2: Root of Evil

Death warmed over

| pub. Konami dev. Backbone
esrb T msrp $39.99

I don't think I've ever played a game more *almost* likable than the original *Death, Jr.* Bridging the gap between Saturday-morning cartoon and Saturday-night horror flick, the game had a tantalizingly hip look. Under the hood, however, it lacked substance, marred by sloppy execution and a reliance on fart jokes.

Like the skull-headed adolescent of the game's title, *Root of Evil* is awkward, almost grown-up, and, still, *almost* likable. Once again combining the aerial acrobatics of a platformer with the weapons cache of a shooter, *Death, Jr. 2* is easily more playable than the original. A new control scheme makes shootouts more manageable (and actually fun, in proper doses). But it suffers from the same stoner hodgepodge of aimless, seemingly unrelated levels, strung together by a few silly cut-scenes of plot. This time, DJ's soul-reaping pop has been kidnapped by a perky cheerleader who wants nothing more than to be evil. The only way to get dad back is to blast your way across barnyards, shopping malls, and, uh...the World of Waffles restaurant, before finally destroying the cursed, evil Mrs. Perfect with—you guessed it—toxic flatulence. Sigh...

Silly throwaway story aside, *DJ2*'s greatest flaw is its ham-fisted, kill-kill-kill pace. There are a few attempts at puzzles and plenty of hopping around, but nonstop firefights wear thin. Adding to the problem, *DJ2* ties unlocking new weapons to finding hidden items. This may have been an attempt to create something to do besides slaughter the game's cast of freak-show enemies, but the levels aren't built for exploration. In unlocking extra weapons, you'll be putzing around the levels long after the bullets are spent.

Death, Jr. 2 works best during its demented side shows, such as when DJ dodges evil waffle irons while Louie the Llama, head chef at the World of Waffles, babbles bat-s*** crazy non sequiturs like, "Babies taste better with syrup." It's a psychotic, disjointed, *almost* lovable mess. | Robert Ashley

VERDICT *Death, Jr. 2* is a solid if sophomoric attempt to fill the hole in the hole in your heart where a mindless shooter should be.

score 6 | 10



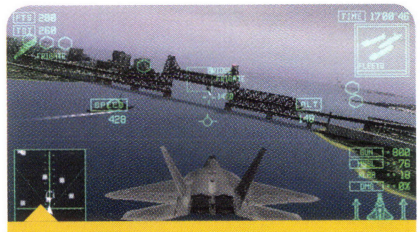
Couples Skate

If you happen to have a friend with a copy of *Death, Jr. 2*, you can share the love/hate in the game's new co-op mode. It's a buddy-buddy version of the main game, though one of you gets to play as future Suicide Girl Pandora. Don't tell her dad.



Top Guns?

Republican former congressman Randy "Duke" Cunningham pled guilty to tax evasion, conspiracy to commit bribery, and mail and wire fraud. Of course, he was also a decorated Navy pilot, a real-life Top Gun graduate. Takes all kinds!



Ace Combat X: Skies of Deception

A relaxing dive into mediocrity

| pub. Namco Bandai dev. Namco
esrb E10+ msrp $39.99

There's nothing wrong with the *Ace Combat* series that a few good drastic changes can't cure. Although it has yet to reach the self-indulgent money-cow status of *Dynasty Warriors*, it's hard to play *Ace Combat X: Skies of Deception* without feeling like Namco sort of phoned this one in, counting on the novelty of flying a plane on the PSP to carry played-out gameplay.

The story is a functional tale set in a brand-new world full of real, almost real, and utterly unbelievable aircraft locked into spirals of murder with each other. In this setting, you play as an ace set to defend and liberate his home country of Aurelia from Leasath. Leasath conquered your home country, but as you fight for liberation a predicable deception will reveal itself. In the skies.

And not to hammer home the point too deeply, but it's all about that predictable. It's not bad, but the whole experience is so deeply familiar that it's hard to muster excitement for the new PSP features. Being able to tune your unlocked planes with the unlocked parts is cool, and certainly, it's nice to be able to fiddle with the "Strategic AI," but all of that really comes to one more hangar screen and replaying missions to make sure you kill enemies in the "win" order, not the "let the ground troops out of containment and they wipe you from the sky" order. The controls themselves are probably the only surprise, being quite passable. It would be a tremendous improvement if the PSP had that darned second analog stick, if only to open up some more command options, but Namco did a decent job of making the nub and button set feel like enough. But then Namco shipped it with ad hoc only wireless support. The whole thing amounts to "meh." | Patrick Joynt

PROS Jets are pretty fun, aren't they?
CONS More of the same from the *Ace Combat* series

score 6 | 10



Gitaroo Man Lives!

Before there were heroes, there was a man

| pub. Koei dev. iNiS
esrb E msrp $39.99

You might have heard of *Gitaroo Man* before. The game originally appeared on the PlayStation 2 in early 2002 and received a warm reception, though a limited print run made it difficult to find shortly after its release. The PSP version is essentially the same game, but it has a few new multiplayer options, including a duet mode where two separate players combine their skills on a single song. It's not really that big of an addition, but features and modes aren't the things that give *Gitaroo Man* its charm to begin with. More simply, it's the combination of the premise, the soundtrack, and the straightforward mechanics that make it so much fun to play.

Gitaroo Man can best be described as a *Dance Dance Revolution*–type game, but instead of just pressing buttons at the appropriate time (you will be doing that to defend against enemy attacks), you also have to use the analog stick to trace a line that mimics the pitch of the guitar while pressing and holding a button to mimic strumming. It's no *Guitar Hero*, to be sure, but it's only a matter of time before you really get into it and feel the same kind of rush. And the fact that the soundtrack features a couple of different genres of music—ranging from rock to J-pop—only makes it that much more enjoyable.

Unfortunately, it all ends too quickly. *Gitaroo Man Lives!* is a pretty challenging game, and it make take you a few tries to get through some levels, but after everything starts clicking, you'll likely blow through it in a single afternoon. Still, it has enough charm to keep some people coming back for more even after completing it, but most will probably put *Gitaroo Man* down after that, wishing for more.

PROS Great soundtrack and gameplay mechanics
CONS Too short, needs more multiplayer modes

score 7 | 10



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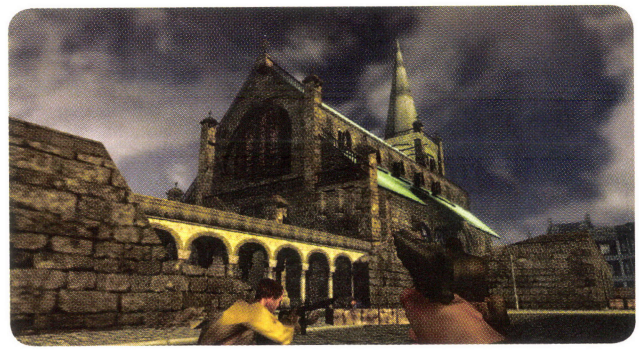
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Medal of Honor Heroes

EA's new title mixes innovation and antiquity

| pub. EA Games dev. EA Canada
esrb T msrp $39.99

Even though many gamers have grown deeply weary of putting down the Axis, having the experience available on the go and specifically crafted for the portable format makes *Medal of Honor Heroes* a triumph. As one of three familiar soldiers from previous *MOH* games, you march across Europe, committing feats of derring-do in order to stop the German threat. Wide-open vistas, beautiful Italian villas, and somber ruins of churches provide some of the backdrops for your missions. In short, *Heroes* perfectly captures the unique, fun vibe of the *Medal of Honor* classics.

Crucially, EA hasn't just shoved some *MOH* levels onto a UMD and shipped it. Missions might drag into the quarter-hour mark, and the more difficult areas might require a few tries, but those are the highest-end time commitments. The developers clearly expended considerable energy making sure that missions were satisfying to complete but also short enough to play through on a commuter's schedule. If your concerns are more on shooting than story, a customizable Skirmish mode will let you vanquish bloodthirsty (if not particularly intelligent) bots to your heart's delight.

In a fit of brilliance, the developers included almost any control scheme you can think of—using the face buttons to turn and the analog nub to move worked for me, but it's easy to customize a layout that compliments your play style. Optional aiming and strafing assists finish up the job of making a first-person shooter not just playable but viscerally fun with the PSP's analog nub.

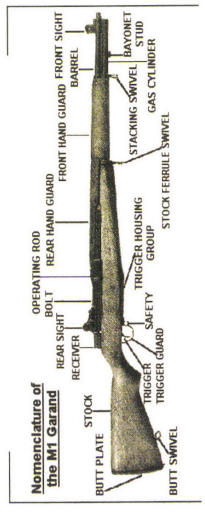
Eight-player ad-hoc wireless is a higher bar than most PSP developers manage to reach, but EA also tacks on 32-player infrastructure play with *Medal of Honor Heroes*. That's a tremendous number to have running smoothly in any game, but for a PSP title, it's spectacular. Using skins unlocked during the single-player game, you can jump into an active match to either kill some time or get really involved in the online scene, depending on your ambitions. Although some maps seem a bit crowded (in a full game, two players occasionally can spawn right on top of each other, for example), the game's online mode has raised the bar for portable multiplayer.

Gremlins got into the engine, though, with soldiers occasionally running up to a wall to get to an enemy, hitting the wall, and running about halfway inside it, from which they start shooting and throwing grenades. Some other graphical issues show up as well, which casts an amateur-hour shadow on the whole game. And while your ultra-aggressive squadmates will cover you, they only do so if they're nearby—they don't really take orders or maintain unit cohesion.

Despite some ugly flaws, however, *Medal of Honor Heroes* manages to fulfill the PSP's promise of delivering a console-level experience in a portable medium. Taking classic characters from the *Medal of Honor* series, *Heroes* creates the same sense of individual valor and, well, heroism that the *MOH* games have always focused on. Like *Liberty City Stories* and *Tekken: Dark Resurrection*, *Heroes* stands as proof that, with the right developer, the PSP is capable of creating unprecedented portable gaming opportunities. | Patrick Joynt

VERDICT WWII is the same as it ever was, but the PSP has another champion. The technical issues should've been fixed, though.

score **8** 10



Let Me Reload!

Sure, it goes against most common sense. But it is physically possible to reload an M1 Garand's "en bloc" clip when it's partially discharged–pop it out and put a new one in. So why is it impossible in virtually every WWII game in existence, including this one? Free the M1 Garand! Let me reload!

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Dynasty Warriors Vol. 2

Koei issues another notice of mediocre mastery

| pub. Koei dev. Omega Force
esrb T msrp $39.99

When a new *Dynasty Warriors* ships on a home console, technical stillness and placidity are expected. The home systems' technical limits have been about as reached as they're going to get for the ol' *Warriors*. However, to see technical issues that plagued the first PSP *Dynasty Warriors* game still present in *Vol. 2* (more than a year later) is absurd. On top of that, a virtually unchanged feature list is a lovely bit of insult in addition to the injury of unresolved grotesque technical problems.

The gameplay's signature issue is camera problems, which the PSP's lack of a second stick aggravates. The camera is still a wild beast in the musou, free, and multiplayer modes, leaving enemies free to snipe at you from offstage or to launch game-ending, unblockable combo chains from an area where they can't be seen. Enemies still seemingly have access to teleportation technology, as they'll appear onscreen, vanish, and then reappear where they were, or behind you, or any other place they choose, all while the PSP struggles to draw them in. And, if anything, this problem is worse in *Vol. 2* than it was in the first game.

On the plus side, there is a drastic reduction in slowdown, but in terms of cheap deaths it's six of one or a half dozen of another. Another positive is that the branching story tracks that musou mode now offers bring welcome depth, and there is some local wireless play, as ad hoc lets up to four players trade minions from their sequel-expanded officer list and battle in a few modes. Game sharing or true wireless would have made this a real feature in a better sequel but, with so little added and key technical issues unaddressed, this is just another half-done part of a half-done game. With a full year since the original and no major changes to implement, this should have been great. Instead, it's just more *Dynasty Warriors*. | **Patrick Joynt**

THE TRUTH It's possible to change up a series and keep true to it. This makes *Madden*'s worst look innovative and fresh.

score **4** | 10



Other Powerful Stones

Sharon Stone, actress
Rolling Stones, band
Joss Stone, singer
Matt Stone, South Park guru
Sly Stone & Family, band
Stone Phillips, newscaster

Damn Dirty Neutrals!

Each cycle of *Dynasty Warriors* is even less risk-taking or imaginative than any given iteration of *Madden*. Just once a cycle, say every *Xtreme Legends*, Koei should do something different and risky with potential payoffs...like fun.



Power Stone Collection

Now...lo...ading

| pub. Capcom dev. Capcom
esrb T msrp $29.99

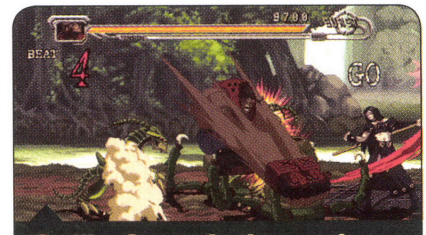
There was no finer example of how controls can make or break a game than the Dreamcast versions of *Power Stone* and its sequel. The fact that they were so simple but incredibly responsive made both games a total blast to play, so you can imagine how slightly worse controls would negatively impact the PSP versions of these games. They both feel just a little bit sluggish, which may or may not be an inherent design flaw in the PSP hardware. But it just seems like you can't move around with the same kind of precision.

Still, it's not like they're totally unplayable—both games are still pretty enjoyable right from the get-go. In fact, when you actually get them going, they make for perfect pick-up-and-play games. Most of that has to do with the simple fighting mechanics where you can pull off special moves with a button press or two. Less of it has to do with the original *Power Stone*'s small arenas, which make for fast-paced multiplayer or single-player battles. The sequel's boost in environmental interaction does the same, but the bigger arenas tend to detract a little more from the 1-on-1 action by placing more emphasis on collecting items scattered about—it's not quite as much fun. Though, in both cases, playing against human opponents is always much more fun than playing against the AI, which will take more than a few cheap shots at you to get your precious stones.

However, all of this only applies if you can withstand the entire collection's terrible, terrible, terrible load times. Actually, they're so bad that they almost totally negate the pick-up-and-play aspects of the game or even the fast-paced nature of the fights—in fact, in some cases, the loading time lasts longer than the fights. But if you can get through that, you'll find fun beat-em-ups that serve as a testament to the greatness of simplicity in games. | **Giancarlo Varanini**

PROS Great graphics, controls a bit sluggish but still good
PROS Long loading time and occasionally cheap AI

score **7.5** | 10



Guilty Gear Judgment

Fighting for 2D in a 3D world

| pub. Majesco dev. ARC Systems Works
esrb T msrp $39.99

Guilty Gear Judgment is the kind of game that makes you say, "You can take your polygons and teraflops and cram them in the unhappy zone!" In fact, seeing how great the game looks will only make you wish that there were more 2D games like this on the PSP and that are just as much fun. Don't be fooled by the packaging, though. While *Judgment* could seemingly be billed as two games in one, it's more like a game with an extra full-fledged mode added on.

The main game is still *Guilty Gear X2*, which is arguably one of the best games in the *Guilty Gear* series. Its frantic gameplay and easily executable combinations are perfect for those who aren't totally skilled at fighting games. In other words, button mashers won't have a hard time getting a few wins here and there. At the same time, the more skilled players can learn some of the better, over-the-top, epilepsy-inducing moves and combinations that make *X2* so much fun.

The other "mode" in *Judgment* is essentially a *Final Fight*–style beat-em-up that lets you use all of the moves for each character in the main game. It definitely feels like a much more polished version of a similar mode found in *Guilty Gear Isuka*, mainly because you no longer have to jump in between different planes of combat. That made the previous mode such a chore to play, but the revised version makes *Judgment* and its hordes of enemies (and gorgeous environments) more fun. The only downside is that when you lose all of your lives you start at the very beginning of the game, but you do get to access new characters you have encountered while playing through this mode. Plus, it gives you a chance for some two-player cooperative action. Really, it doesn't get much better than this for 2D fighting fans. | **Giancarlo Varanini**

PROS Great visuals and audio, controls are simple and easy to use, includes *Guilty Gear X2*
CONS A little button masher–friendly, no continues in Judgment mode

score **8** | 10


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WTF: Work Time Fun

OMFG

| pub. 03 Publisher of America dev. Sony CEI
esrb T msrp $29.99

If you read the name of the game and thought "sounds like a pretty stupid gimmick," congratulations: You're right. The latest game to jump on the bandwagon of nonsensical and cheap-looking minigame collections, *WTF: Work Time Fun* subjects you to such thrilling tasks as chopping wood ("Lumberjack"), working at a pen factory ("Pendemonium"), and accurately counting the number of people that walk onto the screen ("Traffic Counter"). Excited yet?

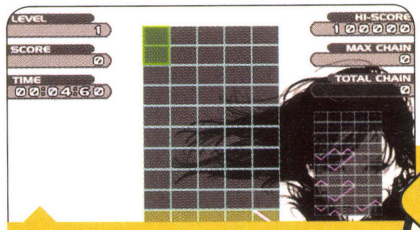
"Wassup! These are today's jobs! Now go work like a dog!" These words—often barked at you by a big pile of talking red slime as you choose from among *WTF*'s assorted minigames—nicely sum up the whole experience. Contrary to the fast-paced chaos present in most games of this type (notably Nintendo's *WarioWare* series), *WTF* almost feels too structured, as it forces you to repeat the same chore over and over (...and over...and over...) until you eventually either mess up or get bored enough to stop. In particular, the aforementioned Pendemonium game—where you literally just hit a button to put caps on pens, while occasionally hitting a second button to adjust a misaligned pen—comes about as close as possible to a handheld sweatshop simulator.

And, much like a real sweatshop, *WTF* provides little incentive to keep you going. Decent performance gets you a meager amount of money to spend at one of several vending machines, which spit out additional minigames, numerous other strange applications (including a ramen timer, for all you poor college students out there), and entirely useless tchotchkes. You periodically receive in-game e-mail from other "employees," who mostly just complain about their jobs or offer up other bits of completely random conversation, but this—and the routinely small payoffs—makes for some pretty diminishing returns.

At worst, you can force your friends to share in your misery via *WTF*'s multiplayer option (accessible from the aptly named Hell Cantina), though all this offers is the same damn assortment of utterly dull minigames. *WTF*, indeed. | Ryan Scott

VERDICT Too much "W" and "T" but not enough "F."

score 4 | 10



Gunpey

Practice your linear thinking

OPM GAME OF THE MONTH

| pub. Namco Bandai dev. Q Entertainment
esrb E10+ msrp $29.99

No, this isn't a game about firearms and money. Instead, it's the latest puzzle game from Q Entertainment. Company head Tetsuya Mizuguchi has never made any secret about his love of music and music videos, and it's always been very apparent that his passion influences the design of his games. His latest title, *Gunpey*, is no exception.

Like *Every Extend Extra*, *Gunpey* is actually a remake of an existing game (it was originally a title for the WonderSwan, a Japan-only handheld console released by Bandai). The screen is divided into five columns that are each split into a series of vertical cells, and the screen gradually slides up, revealing line segments. Your goal is to connect complete lines across all five cells, without letting any line segments hit the top of the screen; lines that use more segments give you a higher point total.

It's a simple concept, and much like *Lumines*, it works addictively well. After a few sessions, you'll see the lines marching across your eyelids when you're trying to sleep at night. The backgrounds and music are, for the most part, excellent—but every once in a while, there will be contrast issues. Oh, and I could definitely have done without the background of the dog defecating. Yes, you read that correctly.

Outside of the main challenge mode are a number of other variations—10x10, which doubles the width of the grid; quick timed sessions, where you try and get as high a score as possible in 60, 90, or 120 seconds; and single-skin mode. The most interesting is double skin, where you're actually playing two separate games simultaneously, switching back and forth between the grids in an attempt to hang on as long as possible.

The weakest part of the game is multiplayer; there's only two-player ad hoc available, and that only has one versus mode that doesn't even allow you to see how the other person is doing. But despite that flaw, *Gunpey* still makes line creation a whole lot more fun than art class ever did. | Dana Jongewaard

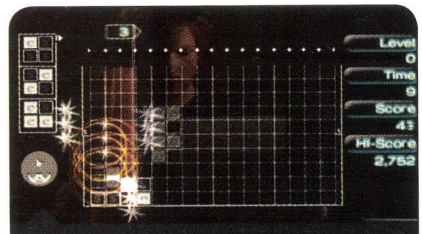
VERDICT Playing the Pey is A-OK.

score 8 | 10



In Memoriam

Gunpei Yokoi was most famous for creating the original Nintendo Game Boy back in 1989. After he was killed in a car accident in 1997, the decision was made to name the first title for the WonderSwan system (which Yokoi helped develop) in his memory.



Lumines II

Second verse, almost identical to the first

| pub. Buena Vista Games dev. Q Entertainment
esrb T msrp $29.99

First things first: Though this game may have a "*II*" in the title, it is in no way a full-fledged sequel. In fact, it's almost not even a *Lumines 1.5*. The basic gameplay and multiplayer are exactly the same as they were before.

So what's different? The most obvious change is the (mostly) new music and new skins. Theoretically, that's a nice touch, but I'm not a fan of the mainstream music that has crept into the mix. The nice thing about house tunes is that you can hear them over and over for quite a while before they become repetitious—they're much more background appropriate. I'd already heard plenty of the Black Eyed Peas' "Pump It" before I ever booted up this game, though, and having the video playing in the background is completely distracting—my focus kept drifting on all of the video-backed levels. The extra technical load of a moving background also means that sometimes there's an annoying little skip between stage transitions that can prevent you from positioning a piece correctly.

However, once you've unlocked a good variety of skins, you can avoid the ones you dislike by building your own set list, which you can set to play through once or loop endlessly. You can also try your hand at creating your own background music by tweaking four available tracks through tempo adjustment and playing with a mixing board. It's not terribly deep, but it provides another level of customization.

My favorite addition is the mission mode. Unlike the puzzle options of the first game (which show up again here), these missions are much more straightforward—for example, clear the screen before five minutes is up, or delete eight blocks of squares in one sweep of the timeline. Most of them are pretty simple, but it's a nice break from the challenge mode.

If you didn't buy the first game and you like more mainstream music, then this might not be a bad choice for you. But people who already own *Lumines* should spend their money on *Gunpey* instead. | Dana Jongewaard

VERDICT Too much the same to shell out another $30.

score 6 | 10

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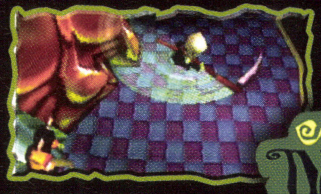
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Brandon Routh, Kevin Spacey

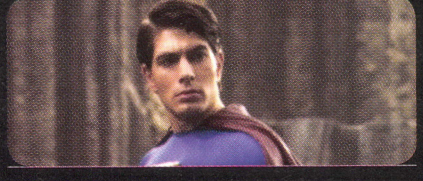
Superman Returns

Super-serious, not super-fun by John Scalzi

The good news with this film is that old-school viewers of the *Superman* series can now officially pretend that the silly *Superman III* and the unspeakable *Superman IV* don't exist; this flick slices off that continuity and splices on another, apparently talking place five years after the events of *Superman II*. Call it *Superman II.V*. The other good news is that, really, this film looks amazing. Those kids with their computers sure make special effects look fine. And the film has a nice-looking cast, too: Brandon Routh and Kate Bosworth strike me as a little young for Superman and Lois Lane—Lois would have had to have been an ace reporter at about age 14 and knocked up right out of high school for it to track—but what the hell, it's Hollywood.

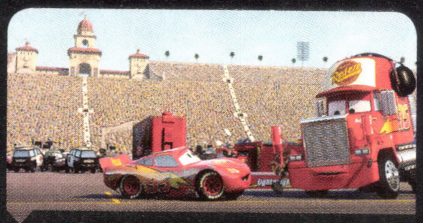
The bad news, which isn't really bad but just kind of deflating, is that this film isn't a whole lot of fun; not nearly as much fun as the two films it wants to be in continuity with. Those films had the benefit of the light touch of director Richard Donner (the second film is officially credited to Richard Lester, who also has a light touch, but much of it was filmed by Donner), who could both film action and crack a nice joke. This time around, we've got Bryan Singer. He's is a fine director, but the dude ain't exactly a ray of sunshine; prior to this he was helming the *X-Men* series, the most dour superhero films ever.

Singer's dourness doesn't sink *Superman*—he's not that depressing—but it does mute the film; not even Kevin Spacey as Lex Luthor gives this film the injection of levity it needs to go from being entirely respectable to being, well, super. But Singer's planning another *Superman* in 2009, I hear. This one is good enough to hope that the next one will be even better.





score **7**/10



Cars
Owen Wilson, Paul Newman

It says something about the level of expectation with Pixar that this flick could bring in $240 million and be the second most popular film of the year (to date) and people still think it's a bit of a disappointment. It's not—it's bright and funny and fun with eye-popping visual design and excellent casting. Is it a home run, like *The Incredibles* or *Toy Story*? No. But it's a solid triple. For God's sake, let's have some perspective.

SCORE **7.5** | 10



CLERKS II
Brian O'Halloran, Rosario Dawson

Kevin Smith's a niche director, which is a nice way of saying he's a one-trick pony. His niche/trick is writing about filthy-mouthed, pop-culture-saturated New Jersey slackers who are trying to figure out what the hell they're doing with their lives. Smith writes about them because he's one of them, and like them, it takes him a bunch of bitching and snarking and digression and avoidance before he can get to the friggin' point.

This is not a complaint, because—as *Clerks II* shows—Smith makes it work. Dante and Randal, exiled from their beloved Quick Stop to the world of fast food, confront the fact they're thirtysomethings now, but in the detour-filled way that includes mocking *The Lord of the Rings* and donkey sex shows. Maturity isn't what it used to be.

SCORE **7** | 10



The Da Vinci Code
Tom Hanks, Audrey Tautou

The problem here is that, really, *The Da Vinci Code* is silly beach reading, trashy fun disguised as brain food because the hero's from Harvard and it's about Jesus, and this movie adaptation treats it like a lost book of the Bible. It's all so painfully serious that you want to make fart noises with your hands just to lighten things up. I'm a fan of Hanks and of director Ron Howard, but, guys, try a comedy next time, hey?

SCORE **6** | 10



An Inconvenient Truth
Al Gore

Yeah, yeah, I know. One mention of Al Gore, and suddenly half of you get all foamy that he hasn't been waterboarded for treason. Don't be a moron, OK? It's possible that someone who doesn't share your politics might have something compelling to say. Gore has compelling things to say about global warming, and the film itself is well put together and interesting. You don't have to vote for the guy, just listen to him.

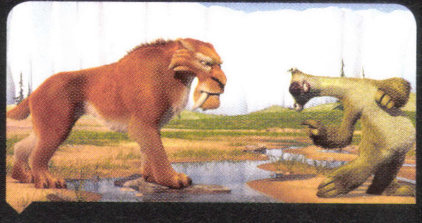
SCORE **7.5** | 10



Strangers With Candy
Amy Sedaris, Stephen Colbert

If ever a movie was meant to be released on YouTube, this would be it. This film, in which a fortysomething former drug addict goes back to high school as a student, doesn't hang together very well as a full cinematic experience, but as a repository of 30-to-90-second chunks of uncomfortable comedy that hold up well streamed in a Flash-based player. This is a gold mine, baby. And look, Stephen Colbert!

SCORE **6** | 10



Ice Age: The Meltdown
Ray Romano, Denis Leary

Harmless but entirely unnecessary sequel to Ice Age, in which the world is warming up, which serves as an excuse for the characters to walk around and have adventures just like they did in the first film. I'm personally looking forward to *Ice Age III: The Tar Pit*, in which they all stay in one place and slowly sink. But maybe I'm just a bastard that way. But it does have Queen Latifah as a lady mammoth. Works for me.

SCORE **6** | 10



Little Man
Marlon Wayans, Shawn Wayans

Why haven't the Wayans been Guantanamoed for their crimes against all things good? Can we not speak to God and arrange a trade, wherein we get back Richard Pryor in exchange for the entire Wayans family driving their limos off the Ventura Highway and vanishing into a spontaneously appearing fissure in the Earth? Is it too much to ask for? After watching this appalling film, I tell you it is not.

SCORE **2** | 10



You, Me and Dupree
Owen Wilson, Matt Dillon

The Man Who Came to Dinner for the idiot set, which, if you can catch the reference, you're not in. Congratulations. Having said that, this film, while basically dim, is not uncongenial, and that's mostly due to Owen Wilson's personal stoner charm. It's hard not to just give him a pass, which is, of course, the sentiment his character's supposed to arouse, too. To that respect, well done, filmmakers. Well done indeed.

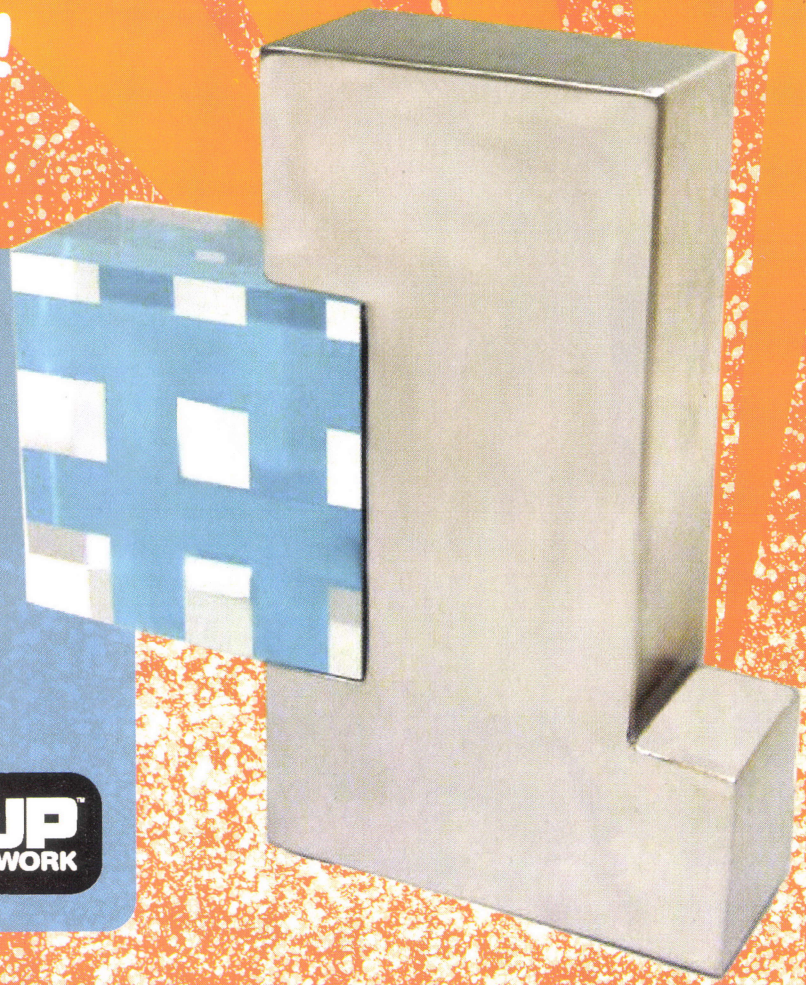
SCORE **5.5** | 10

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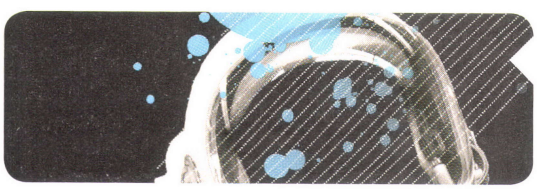
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Shooter
Sports
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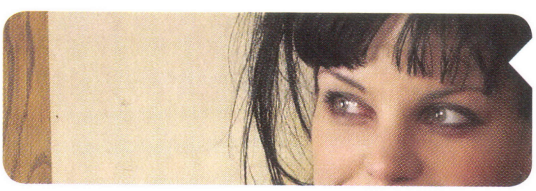
Revving up the PlayStation wayback machine



OUT TO LAUNCH 142
What we can learn from Past Sony launches



SOUND STATION 148
You may be familiar with most of the songs in Guitar Hero II, but here's a few classics that might be new to you



YOUR FIRST TIME 150
Pauley Perette of NCIS fame talks about the PlayStation character who keeps her up at night.

Out to Launch

SONY'S PAST SYSTEM DEBUTS OFFER FOOD FOR THOUGHT ON PS3

The PlayStation 3 is a favorite target of pundits and detractors who'd love to see Sony get some sort of comeuppance in exchange for 10 years of peerless success, and the system's launch lineup is one of their favorite talking points. "There's no killer app," they sneer, "and more and more games keep getting delayed."

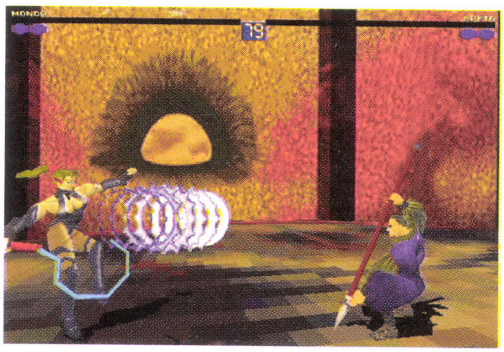
But if history teaches us anything, it's that Sony thinks about the long term. Its console launches have always challenged the conventional wisdom of what a system's debut should be...and in the end, Sony still comes out ahead.

Still, the costly and powerful PS3 is a risky proposition, even for a company with a practically perfect hardware track record. Has Sony heeded the lessons of the past?

by Jeremy Parish



ps1



1 Battle Arena Toshinden
2 The Raiden Project
3 Kileak





LAUNCH SYSTEM SPECS

Dimensions: 10.5 x 7.25 x 2 inches
Weight: 2.8 pounds
I/O: Controller (2), Memory Card (2), AV Out (composite video), Parallel Port, Serial Port
Debut Price: $299



playstation

The Launch

September 9, 1995

The Lineup

Battle Arena Toshinden
Sony CEA • OPM Score: N/A
ESPN Extreme Games
Sony CEA • OPM Score: N/A
Kileak: The DNA Imperative
Sony CEA • OPM Score: N/A
NBA Jam Tournament Edition
Acclaim • OPM Score: N/A
Power Serve 3D Tennis
Ocean • OPM Score: N/A
The Raiden Project
Sony CEA • OPM Score: N/A
Rayman
Ubisoft • OPM Score: N/A
Ridge Racer
Namco • OPM Score: N/A
Street Fighter: The Movie
Capcom • OPM Score: N/A
Total Eclipse Turbo
Crystal Dynamics • OPM Score: N/A
Twisted Metal
Sony CEA • OPM Score: N/A
Warhawk
Sony CEA • OPM Score: N/A

The Lesson

A killer app is nice, but it's even better to cover all your bases.

Before the PlayStation came along, the prevailing belief was that a launch was useless without a single killer app. Nintendo was the primary beneficiary of that nugget of wisdom, dutifully trotting out an amazing new *Mario* game with each generation of hardware.

But things changed when Sony launched the PlayStation. There wasn't a single title that stood out as a world-shaker on day one—though the nearly arcade-perfect *Ridge Racer* came close—but what Sony did offer was variety. The competing Nintendo 64 launched with a paltry two games, and those who didn't like *Mario* or flight sims were out of luck. Yet almost anyone could walk into a store in November 1995 and find a PlayStation game that appealed to them, be they arcade fans, fighting game fans, FPS fans, platformer fans, racing fans, or sports fans.

The message was clear: The PlayStation was a system for everyone. (And it had pretty amazing graphics, too.) And everyone flocked to the system—developers, publishers, and gamers alike.

How Does the PS3 Stack Up?

There is no lack of day-one variety in the PS3's launch titles. So, assuming you can actually find a system, there's almost certainly a game that will suit your tastes. From brisk action (*Genji*) to platforming (*Sonic*) to sports (*Madden*) to shooters (*Resistance*), the PS3 covers its bases and
then some.

However, Nintendo's Wii, which launches two days after the PS3, could be a small spoiler for the event. Although Nintendo's still relying on the "killer-app" strategy—the Wii launches with the much-delayed *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* in tow—the company is, for the first time ever, releasing a system with a broad range of games. Arguably broader than Sony's, in fact, since Nintendo's new favorite market is the ultra-casual gamer...a demographic that will be underrepresented on the PS3 at launch. On the other hand, the PS3 offers a graphical leap that's an order of magnitude above what the Wii represents, so it's still likely to be the hardcore gamer's console of choice this November.

PS2



LAUNCH SYSTEM SPECS

Dimensions: 11.8 x 7.2 x 3.0 inches
Weight: 5.3 pounds
I/O: Controller (2), Magic Gate Memory Card (2), FireWire, Ethernet, Optical Audio Out, AV Out (component/composite/S-Video), PCMCIA slot
Debut Price: $299

playstation 2

The Launch

October 26, 2000

The Lineup

Armored Core 2
Agetec • OPM Score: 6 | 10
Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore
Tecmo • OPM Score: 9 | 10
Dynasty Warriors 2
Koei • OPM Score: 8 | 10
ESPN International Track & Field
Konami • OPM Score: 6 | 10
ESPN Winter X Games Snowboarding
Konami • OPM Score: 6 | 10
Eternal Ring
Agetec • OPM Score: 4 | 10
Evergrace
Agetec • OPM Score: 4 | 10
FantaVision
Sony CEA • OPM Score 8 | 10
Gungriffon Blaze
Working Designs • OPM Score: 7 | 10
Kessen
Koei • OPM Score: 6 | 10
Madden NFL 2001
EA Sports • OPM Score: 9 | 10
Midnight Club: Street Racing
Rockstar • OPM Score: 8 | 10
MotoGP
Namco • OPM Score: 8 | 10
NHL 2001
EA Sports • OPM Score: 8 | 10
Orphen: Scion of Sorcery
Activision • OPM Score: 3 | 10
Q-Ball: Billiards Master
Take 2 • OPM Score: 7 | 10
Ready 2 Rumble Boxing: Round 2
Midway • OPM Score 8 | 10
Ridge Racer V
Namco • OPM Score: 9 | 10
Silent Scope
Konami • OPM Score: 6 | 10
Smuggler's Run
Rockstar • OPM Score: 9 | 10
SSX
EA Sports Big • OPM Score: 10 | 10
Street Fighter EX3
Capcom • OPM Score: 7 | 10
Summoner
THQ • OPM Score: 6 | 10
Swing Away Golf
EA Sports • OPM Score: 6 | 10
Tekken TAG Tournament
Namco • OPM Score 9 | 10
TimeSplitters
Eidos • OPM Score: 10 | 10
Unreal Tournament
Infogrames • OPM Score 5 | 10
Wild Wild Racing
Interplay • OPM Score: 6 | 10
X-Squad
EA Games • OPM Score: 7 | 10

The Lesson

Don't get carried away. And deliver on your promises.

The PS2 launch was like the PlayStation launch, but amplified to ridiculous proportions. With more than two dozen games available on day one, Sony actually went too far—few games enjoyed truly excellent sales due to the absolute glut of choices. This was compounded by the hardware shortages that plagued the system for the first six months of its life; games that might have sold well under normal circumstances languished because few gamers actually had a system.

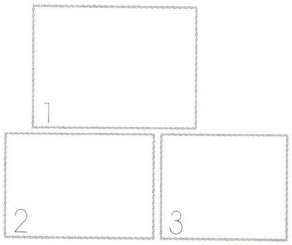
The lack of a truly standout title was a drawback as well. While the PlayStation capably proved that a killer app isn't absolutely necessary, in the PS2's case, it meant that nothing truly stood apart in a sea of mediocre titles. It was a serious letdown after all the company's hype: Here was the system that was supposed to change the world, that supposedly represented a massive leap over everything that had come before...but the software was lame. Besides *SSX* and *Dynasty Warriors 2*, the bulk of the PS2's launch lineup left gamers with an empty feeling of, "Is this all there is?"

How Does the PS3 Stack Up?

Unfortunately, the PS3 may be poised to make the same mistakes. Hardware shortages are a given this time, yet more than 20 titles are on tap for day one. Which brings up the question: Who's going to buy them?

Chances are, not Sony fans. Much of what's available this fall for the PS3 is multiplatform content...so even if the PS3 version looks better than the Xbox 360 version—which isn't actually a given—plenty of gamers who can't connive a system for themselves won't be going away from the store empty-handed. Instead, they'll be taking home the Xbox 360 version.

The PS2's launch succeeded despite the odds thanks to hype (sheer anticipation caused gamers to shun the Dreamcast, not realizing it was almost as powerful as Sony's console) and timing (it arrived a year before the GameCube and the more powerful Xbox). The PS3 doesn't have these factors on its side...which should make for an interesting holiday season.



1 X-Squad
2 Smuggler's Run
3 Evergrace

DESPITE ITS DECENT SCORE, THIS GAME LEFT AN INDELIBLE NON-IMPRESSION ON THE STAFF OF OPM.



BEFORE WE ACTUALLY PLAYED IT, WE THOUGHT SMUGGLER'S RUN WOULD INVOLVE PIRACY AND RUM-IMBIBING.





psp



LAUNCH SYSTEM SPECS

Dimensions: 6.7 x .9 x 2.9 inches
Weight: 9.2 ounces
I/O: Wi-Fi, USB 2.0, Memory Stick PRO Duo, IrDA, IR Remote (SIRCS)
Debut Price: $249

playstation portable

The Launch

March 24, 2005

The Lineup

Ape Escape: On the Loose
Sony CEA • OPM Score: 6|10
ATV Offroad Fury: Blazin' Trails
Sony CEA • OPM Score: 6|10
Darkstalkers Chronicles: The Chaos Tower
Capcom • OPM Score: 6|10
Dynasty Warriors
Koei • OPM Score: 6|10
Gretzky NHL
Sony CEA • OPM Score: 7|10
Lumines
Ubisoft • OPM Score: 8|10
Metal Gear Acid
Konami • OPM Score: 8|10
MLB
Sony CEA • OPM Score: 7|10
NBA
Sony CEA • OPM Score: 5|10
Need for Speed Underground: Rivals
EA Games • OPM Score: 7|10
NFL Street 2 Unleashed
EA Sports Big • OPM Score: 6|10
Ridge Racer
Namco • OPM Score: 9|10
Tiger Woods PGA Tour
EA Sports • OPM Score: 8|10
Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix
Activision • OPM Score: 8|10
Twisted Metal: Head-On
Sony CEA • OPM Score: 8|10
Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade
Sony Online Ent. • OPM Score: 6|10
Wipeout Pure
Sony CEA • OPM Score: 8|10
World Tour Soccer
Sony CEA • OPM Score 6|10



The Lesson

The race is a marathon—don't burn out in the first stretch.

With the PSP, Sony hit the perfect balance of variety, minimalism, and quality. The system had a little of everything, but not too much; the software looked and played great; and there was even a killer app in the form of *Lumines* (although most people didn't realize it). Other hardware makers can only dream of calling this sort of lineup their own.

The problem with the PSP was that Sony played its hand on day one. After the console's March launch, there wasn't much of anything for gamers to look forward to. The highly anticipated *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* was more than half a year away, but what little software became available in the interim was lacking in both quantity and quality. Desperate gamers ultimately resorted to snapping up UMD videos or hacking their PSPs to emulate classic Nintendo and Genesis games. It wasn't until this year that the flow of quality PSP software improved, and even then it's mostly been a trickle.

As a result, the PSP has been far less of a runaway success than everyone expected. Its sales have slightly trailed those of the Nintendo DS in America and Europe, while in Japan the DS is a clear victor—a loss made all the more embarrassing by the fact that the DS wasn't even seen as worthy competition to Sony's far more powerful and beautiful machine.

How Does the PS3 Stack Up?

On the whole, the PS3 is sitting pretty. Although the immediate post-launch software outlook is fairly bleak, it's probably just as well. It's going to be a while before most people can actually find the hardware to begin with, and early adopters will likely have their hands full with the system's huge launch library.

And, fortunately, Sony and its third parties have a decent amount of must-have software coming down the pipeline. The ultra-realistic *Gran Turismo HD* is on the way, Kojima Productions has the incredible *Metal Gear Solid 4* on track for 2007, and the equally gorgeous *Final Fantasy XIII* will probably arrive in 2008. Still, blockbusters alone can't keep a system in first place, as Nintendo learned a decade ago by stacking its N64's small library of AAA smashes against PlayStation's massive array of good-to-great titles.

It will ultimately be the smaller releases that keep gamers engaged between the high-profile titles. And in that regard Sony is on roughly equal footing with Microsoft. Still, Sony has the upper hand—its own past provides all the wisdom it needs to keep the PS3 ahead of the competition. But as they say, those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it...and possibly from the loser's perspective.







SNAKE PROVED THAT HE'S AS GOOD AT CARDS AS HE IS AT SHOOTING.

1
2
3

1 Wipeout Pure
2 Dynasty Warriors
3 Metal Gear Acid



sound station

starring:

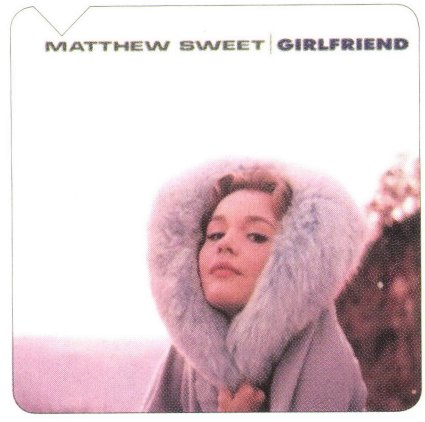
Guitar Hero II

Yeah, we know you know a lot of the songs on *Guitar Hero II*. But here are a few albums with songs featured in the game that you damn kids with your MySpace may not have already heard. | John Scalzi

Matthew Sweet
Girlfriend

Back in the early '90s, Matthew Sweet was totally a record-store-clerk favorite—which is the friggin' kiss of death commercially, because those passive-aggressive bastards wouldn't tell you about Sweet's smart guitar pop because it was too good for you. Some scientist should build Matthew Sweet a time machine so he can go to 1991 and kick the ass of every punk record store clerk he can find.

rating 7|10





Avenged Sevenfold
City of Evil

OK, so it goes like this. Guitars? Shredilicious, totally New Wave of British Heavy Metal guitar attack. Mmmmm...shiny. Rhythm section? When it's pushed into overdrive, it's pure punk goodness. Vocals? WTF? It's like karaoke night at *Wayne's World*. Look, if you're going to front this sort of aggro tuneage, you need to have a voice of Bruce Dickinson proportions. But instead, these dudes harmonize like they're Hello Kitty's neutered kid brothers. Guys, get back to me when you find a lead singer, m'kay?

rating 5|10



Jane's Addiction
Ritual de lo Habitual

Back in the day, Perry Farrell was like what you would've gotten if some TSOL-loving punk boy totally hit it with a hippie chick and their mutant offspring were raised by trash-digging coyotes in Santa Monica. That's just what *Ritual* is like, too: Perry wanders off into space, yodeling about whatever the hell, while guitarist Dave Navarro and the rest of the band stay down here on Earth and rip your head right off. Yes, it was too, too delicious to last.

rating 8|10



The Pretenders
The Pretenders

Sure, it's great to be a kid today, what with the PS3s and the cell phones, whereas if you were a kid in 1980, all you'd have had would have been 8-tracks and a Camaro. But you'd also be the first to hear this album and to bathe in the unspeakable gorgeousness of James Honeyman-Scott's fretwork, not to mention the smart, sexy, sultry siren call of Chrissie Hynde, who even now is the coolest front woman in rock. And it would be a fair trade.

rating 9|10



The Rolling Stones
Sticky Fingers

Vital music from a time when the Rolling Stones were the best rock band on Earth, rather than an ossified music freak show cunningly designed to suck the cash out of the wallets of the Viagra generation. Yeah, laugh while you can, Chuckles. One day you'll be 53, taking in an arena package show of the Strokes, the Killers, and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, and some part of you will be praying to stroke out right there.

rating 9|10



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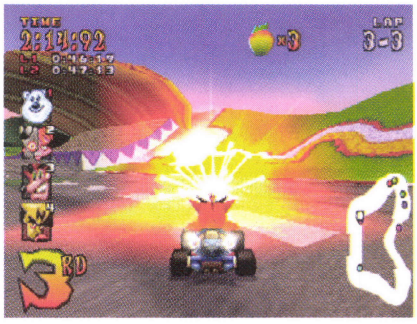
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your first time

Pauley Perrette

The NCIS star remembers how Crash Bandicoot used to keep her up





Most actors insist that they're nothing like the characters they play on TV. But Pauley Perrette, who plays forensic scientist Abby Sciuto on *NCIS*, can't make that claim. Not only do Pauley and Abby look a lot alike and share a passion for heavily caffeinated drinks, but when Pauley was in college, she studied sociology, psychology, and criminal science in hopes of becoming a forensic scientist herself. But while Abby has admitted a passion for MMORPGs, Pauley says her taste in games runs more toward fast animals.

"A few years ago, before I was on *NCIS*, I was on a show produced by Sony, and so they gave me a PlayStation and a bunch of games. And I got so hooked on *Crash Team Racing* that I used to stay up all night playing it. I used to get so lost in that game. My goal was always to beat Coco Bandicoot, because she had a really annoying voice and reminded me of—ugh!—girls I can't stand, cheerleaders and stuff. My goal was always to beat her, and I used to get really excited when I'd hit her with a missile. Though I never played against anyone else. I'm really noncompetitive—it's just not fun for me. The thing is, I'm actually terrified of cars and hate driving, so it's funny that I liked *CTR* so much." **| Paul Semel**

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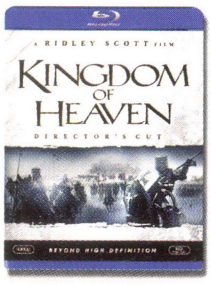
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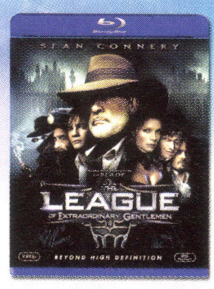
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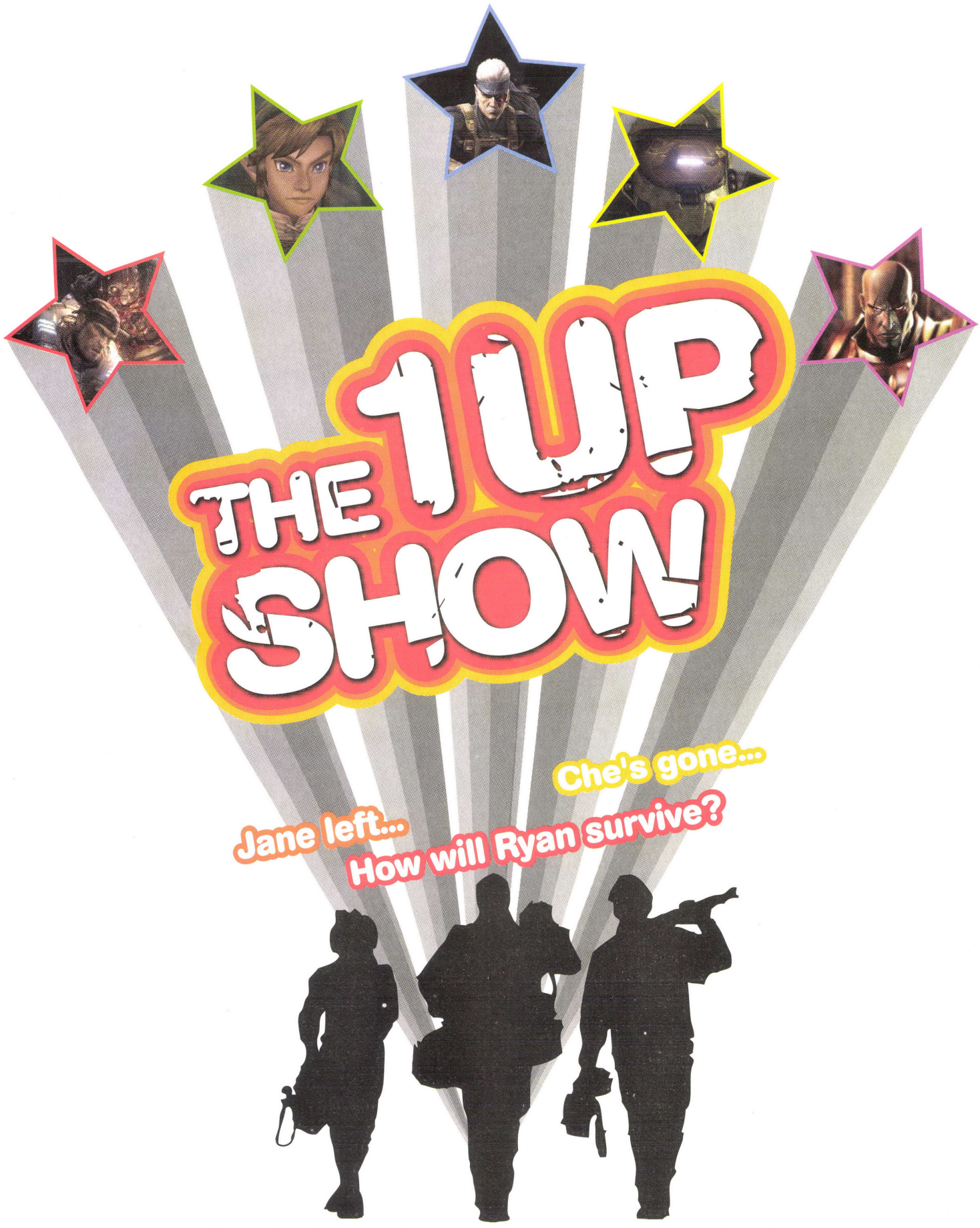
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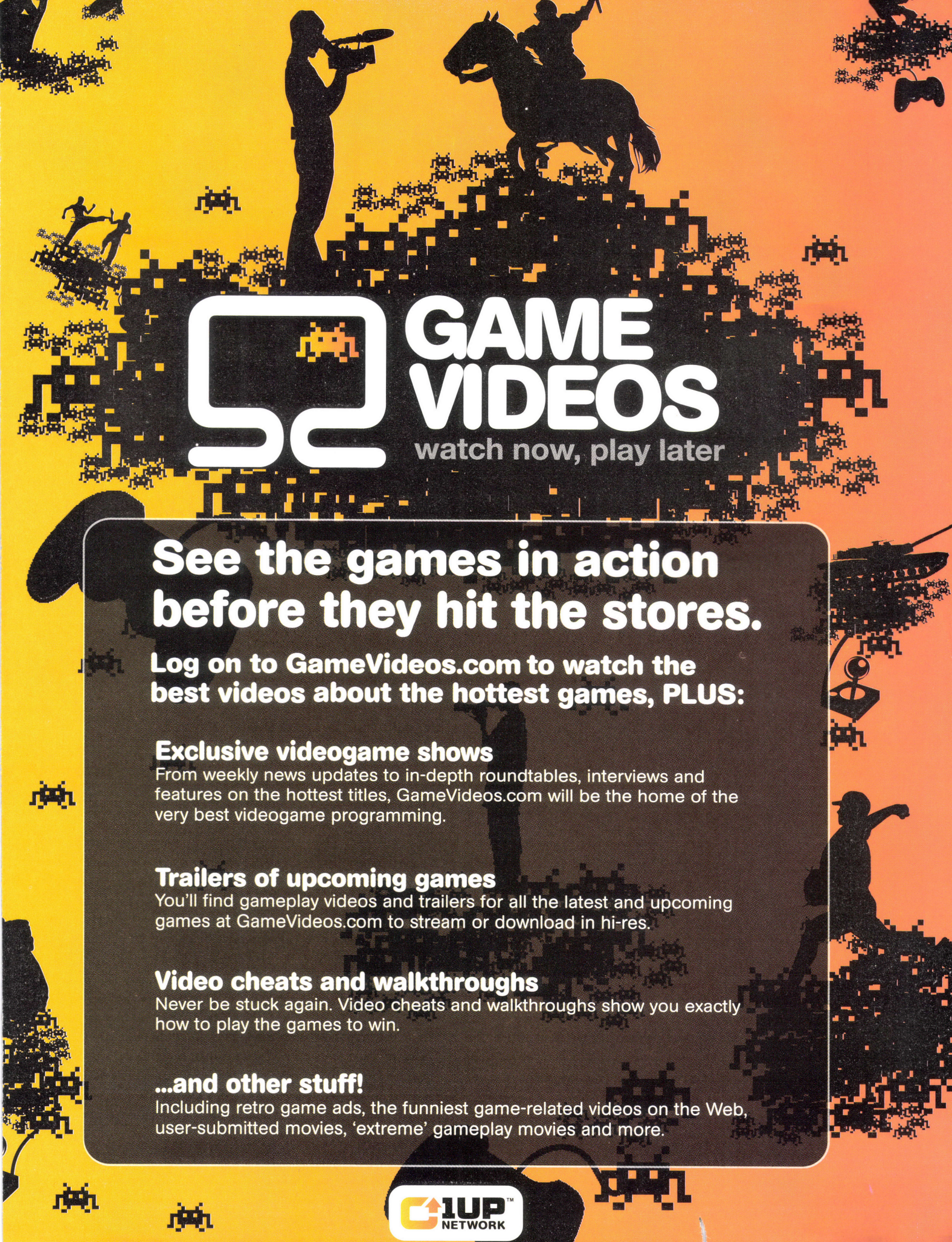
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IN MY DAY

THE MICROTRANSACTED WORLD



JOE RYBICKI remembers a day when "downloadable content" meant ASCII porn. He wants to know your take on the microtransaction revolution. Send your nasty e-mails to opm@ziffdavis.com.

With the recent revelation of *Gran Turismo HD*'s, uh, unorthodox strategy for downloadable content in the game's classic mode, I figured now would be a good time to talk about microtransactions. If you haven't been paying attention, the concept of microtransactions deals with paying small sums of money (generally a buck or two) for downloadable content for your shiny new next-gen system. Xbox Live has been doing this since the launch of the 360, allowing publishers to charge players minimal amounts of money for anything from new themes for the 360's system interface to entirely new add-on content for games.

In theory, it's a great idea. It gives game designers an avenue for selling nonessential extras to their games, and it lets the player pick and choose among available content. In the *GTHD* model, the idea is to allow (some say "force") players to choose only the cars and tracks they want for online play, thereby shaving from the game all that the individual player considers extraneous. Don't want to start with a used Celica hatchback? Don't want to bother with the high-speed ring? You can just jump right into the juicy cars and courses...for a price.

The monetary argument that's made in favor of this decision tends to go like this: Most people only want to play the "good" cars and courses anyway, so the average player is likely to actually spend less money this way than if he or she paid $50 at retail. It's a legitimate point. In theory, anyway.

The problem is that this feels like a very slippery slope. In the case of *GTHD*, you're paying for extra content only; you do still get a game at the store (most likely for a bargain price), and it comes with content of its own—all this downloadable stuff is just gravy.

But it seems to me that it's a very small step from this model to a completely modular one, in which you have to keep paying to play. (Please don't shout at me about MMORPGs; these are games that require a constant, full staff of programmers and moderators, and so are a completely different color of horse.) What would you say to a *Final Fantasy* game where you had to buy—as in, pay real-world money for—additional characters to add to your party? Or a first-person shooter where you had to pay a couple of cents for each clip of ammo? Or a *Madden* game where you had to buy each team separately?

Of course, there's the argument that no one is forced to buy anything, and that our deliciously capitalistic society will put the smack down on any company that tries something along these lines through the simple method of nobody buying the game. But since when has capitalism saved us from bad ideas? People still eat at McDonald's. People still go to movies starring Jessica Simpson. *Arrested Development* was cancelled while *The War At Home* remains on the air. It's a crazy, mixed-up world we live in.

My concern is that the lure of a constant stream of new content (and hence new income) will prove too strong, and gamemakers will end up spending more time coming up with innovative ways to sell small things for small money, and less time, you know, making new games. To me, that'd be a bad thing. But then, I guess I'm old-fashioned.

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39, 41, 43, 45

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90-91, 121

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6-7

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www.capcom.com
156

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www.disney.com
19

Eidos Interactive, Inc.
www.eidos.com
98a-b

Electronic Arts
www.ea.com
demo, 4-5, 12-13

Full Sail Real World Education
www.fullsail.com
123

The Gillette Company
www.gillette.com
135

Ignition USA
www.ignitionusa.com
129

Koei Corporation
www.koei.com
155

Konami America
www.konami.com
1a-1d, 106-107, 137

Mitsubishi Electric
www.mdea.com
103

Namco Bandai Games America
www.namco.com
17, 23, 52, 80-81, 87

Napster
www.napster.com
33

Office for National Drug Control Policy
www.whatsyouranti-drug.com
149

Red Octane
redoctane.com
127

Sega of America
www.sega.com
48-49, 60-61, 66-67

SNK
www.snkplaymoreusa.com
133

Sony Computer Entertainment
www.scea.com
2-3, 28-29, 35, 50-51, 69, 71, 73, 75

Sony Online Entertainment
www.sonyonline.com
46-47

Sony Pictures Entertainment
www.sonypictures.com
101

Spike TV
www.spiketv.com
131

Square Enix U.S.A., Inc.
www.square-enix-usa.com
24-25

Take 2 Interactive
www.take2games.com
21

THQ Inc.
www.thq.com
117

Ubisoft Entertainment
www.ubisoft.com
8-9, 83

Vivendi Universal Games
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